

TALES OF BELKIN

ALEXANDER
PUSHKIN

THE ART OF THE NOVELLA

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PUSHKIN

TRANSLATED BY JOSH BILLINGS

 **MELVILLEHOUSE**
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TALES OF BELKIN
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*“Mme. Prostakova: Since he was young, sir,
he’s been a lover of stories.
Skotinin: Mitrofan takes after me.”*

—THE MINOR

FROM THE PUBLISHER

Having taken it upon ourselves to publish the Tales of I.P. Belkin, which we offer now to the public, we wanted to append an admittedly brief biographical sketch of the late author, and in doing so partly satisfy the justly aroused curiosity of the lovers of our national literature. We turned for this to Maria Aleksyenova Trafilyon, Ivan Petrovich Belkin’s closest relative and his heiress; however, since she did not know the deceased, it was unfortunately impossible for her to give us any information about him. She suggested that we apply ourselves to a certain well-respected man, a former friend of Ivan Petrovich’s. We followed her advice, and received in response to our letter the answer we’d hoped for, which follows. We reproduce it without a single change or addition, as a valuable record of a noble opinion and touching friendship, as well as an adequate source of biographical information.

My Dear Mr. ** **

On the twenty-third of this month I had the honor to receive your letter (sent on the 15th of the same month), in which you expressed your wish for detailed information regarding the childhood, death, military service, domestic situation, and even the hobbies and character of the late Ivan Petrovich Belkin, my onetime dear friend and estate-neighbor. It is with great pleasure that I satisfy all your wishes by passing on to you, my dear sir, those details which, from his conversations and from my own observations, I am able to remember.

Ivan Petrovich Belkin was born to honorable and noble parents in the year 1798, in the village of Goryuhin. His late father, Second Major Peter Ivanovich Belkin, married the young Pelegaya Gavrilovna, of the Trafilin family. He was not a rich man, but he was careful with money, and quite capable when it came to the management of his estate. Their son received his first lessons from the village sexton. He owed this honorable man, apparently, his fondness both for reading and for making his own forays into the realm of Russian literature. In 1815 he enlisted in a chasseur infantry regiment (I can’t remember which number), in which he remained up until 1823. The deaths of his parents, which occurred almost simultaneously, forced him to retire

from the service, and remove himself to the village of Goryuhino, which he had inherited from his father.

After assuming the administration of his estate, Ivan Petrovich, who was inexperienced and possessed a soft heart, weakened the strict discipline that his parents had established, thereby allowing the property to deteriorate. Having replaced the hard-working and efficient steward with which his peasants had grown dissatisfied (as is their wont), he entrusted the run of the village to his old housekeeper, who had won his confidence with her storytelling ability. This stupid old woman was unable to tell a twenty-five ruble coin from a fifty ruble coin; the peasants, to practically all of whom she had stood godmother, were completely unafraid of her. She indulged them completely, colluding with their cheating to the point that Ivan Petrovich was forced to abolish forced labor and institute very modest quit-rents. But the peasants took advantage of his weakness even in this, asking for substantial privileges in the first year and then paying more than two thirds of their rent in nuts, bilberries and such, while still remaining in arrears.

As a friend of Ivan Petrovich's late father, I considered it my duty to offer their son the same advice I had offered him, and more than once volunteered to reestablish the order that he had abandoned. One day, having come to him with this end in mind, I demanded the estate books, denounced the old woman as a cheat, and, in the presence of Ivan Petrovich, engaged myself in a thorough examination. At first the young master followed me with full attention and diligence; but when the accounts showed that in the last two years the number of peasants had increased while the numbers of fowl and cattle had substantially decreased, Ivan Petrovich decided that he was satisfied enough with his initial impressions, and stopped listening to me. Just as my searching and strident questioning of the cheating old steward was driving her to the edge of embarrassment and forcing her to silence, I heard, to my great displeasure, Ivan Petrovich snore deeply in his chair. From that point on I stopped meddling in his business and gave up his affairs (as he himself had) to the care of the Almighty.

This incident, however, did not disrupt our friendship in the least; for I, sympathizing with his pernicious negligence (so usual among our young landowners) sincerely loved Ivan Petrovich. Indeed, I had never loved and will never love so gentle and honorable a young man. On his side, Ivan Petrovich displayed respect for my years and was devoted to me. To his very end he saw me almost every day, valuing my simple conversation, though we resembled each other neither in habits, nor manner of thinking, nor tastes.

Ivan Petrovich led his life with the utmost modesty, avoiding all excess; I never saw him tipsy (a practically unheard of marvel in our region). He had great sympathy for the female sex, but, truth be told, he was bashful as a young girl.*

In addition to the tales, which you were pleased to mention in your letter, Ivan Petrovich left behind a great number of manuscripts, a

portion of which reside with me, and a portion of which were used by his housekeeper for various household tasks. In this manner, last winter, the windows in her wing of the house were stopped with the first chapter of an unfinished novel. The above-mentioned tales were apparently his first attempts. Most of them, as Ivan Petrovich told me, were true stories heard from various people.[†] However, he invented almost all the proper names in them; the names of the villages and towns, on the other hand, were borrowed from our neighborhood; even my estate is mentioned somewhere. All this was done not through any bad intentions, but simply from a lack of imagination.

In the fall of 1828 Ivan Petrovich became ill with catarrhal ague, which turned into a fever, and died, despite the efforts of our district physician, a man of great abilities, especially in the treatment of chronic illnesses, for example corns, etc. He died in my arms in the thirtieth year of his birth and was buried in a church in the village of Goryuhina next to his deceased parents.

Ivan Petrovich was of medium height, with grey eyes, light brown hair, and a straight nose; his face was fair and lean.

That, my dear sir, is everything I can remember concerning the manner of life, occupations, character and appearance of my deceased friend and neighbor. However, in the event that you find it necessary to make some kind of use out of my letter, I humbly request that you do not use my name; for though I highly esteem and love writers, I consider an entry into their ranks to be unnecessary and, at my age, unseemly. With my sincere regards, etc.

November 16th, 1830

Nenarodovo Village

Because we consider it our duty to respect the wish of our author's worthy friend, we will simply offer him our deepest thanks for the information he has given us, and hope that the public appreciates his sincerity and goodwill.

A.P.

*The anecdote following this, which we are not publishing, struck us as excessive; however we assure our readers that it does not include anything slanderous to Ivan Petrovich Belkin

[†]Indeed, in Mr. Belkin's manuscript, the author's hand has written above every tale: "Heard by me from so-and-so person (the rank or title and first letters of the person's name follow). We include these for the benefit of curious investigators. "The Station-master" was told by the titular counselor A.G.N. "The Shot", by lieutenant-colonel I.L.P. "The Undertaker", by the clerk B.V. "The Snowstorm" and "Lady Maid" by the young lady K.I.T.

THE SHOT

"We shot."

—BARATINSKY

*"I swore to kill him according to the rules of dueling
(it was my turn to shoot)."*

—AN EVENING BIVOUAC

I.

We were garrisoned in ***, a small town. Everyone knows what army life is like. Drills and riding in the morning; dinner with the regiment commander or in a Jewish tavern; punch and cards at night. In *** there wasn't a single open house, not a single marriageable girl; so we gathered together by ourselves, where, other than our own uniforms, there was nothing to see.

Only one member of our circle wasn't in the army. He was around thirty-five years old, an accomplishment that made him an old man in our eyes. Experience had given him a lot of advantages over us; because of it, his uncommon gloominess, harsh temper and sharp tongue exerted a strong influence on our young minds. A kind of secrecy surrounded him; he seemed Russian, but had a foreign name. He had served a little in the hussars—well, even. Nobody knew what had made him retire and settle in this sad little town where he lived both poorly and extravagantly at the same time. He walked everywhere, in a worn-out black waist coat, but kept an open table for all the members of our regiment. True, dinner for him meant two or three plates whipped up by a retired soldier, but the champagne flowed like a river.

No one knew what his situation was, or where his money came from, and nobody dared ask him about either of these things. He had books lying around, military manuals mostly, but some novels too. He willingly lent these out and never demanded them back; then again, he never returned the books he borrowed, either. Most of his time was spent shooting pistols. The walls of his room were filled with bullets, down to the last crack, like a honeycomb. An expensive collection of pistols was the single luxury of the run-down shack where he lived. The skill that he'd attained with these instruments was incredible, and if he'd offered to shoot a pear off a hat, no one in our regiment would have hesitated to offer his head as a hat-stand. Conversation in the regiment frequently turned to dueling; Silvio (so I'll call him) never joined in. When asked whether or not he'd ever been in a duel, he answered dryly that he had, but didn't go into details; it was clear to

us that he didn't like those kinds of questions. We decided that his conscience was weighed down by an unlucky victim. It never occurred to us to suspect him of anything like timidity. There are people whose appearance alone makes suspicions like that impossible. But a strange incident caught us all by surprise.

One day ten of us were eating at Silvio's. We drank the usual amount—a lot, in other words. After dinner we persuaded our host to play cards with us. He refused for a long time; he almost never played; finally he sent someone to get cards, poured fifty or so gold pieces onto the table, and sat down to deal. We gathered around, and the game got under way. Silvio liked to stay quiet during a game, neither arguing nor explaining himself. If a bettor miscalculated, he either payed up the correct amount or marked down the surplus. We knew he liked to do this and never stopped him from running the game as he wished; but that night there was an officer in the group who had been recently transferred to us. At one point during the game, without thinking, he turned down a card corner. Silvio picked up the chalk and adjusted the score the way he always did. The officer, thinking this was a mistake, began to argue. Silvio continued dealing quietly. The officer, having run out of patience, grabbed the brush and erased the penalty that seemed, to him, to have been incorrectly marked. Silvio picked up the chalk and marked it again. The officer, flushed with wine, the game, and the laughter of his companions, took great offence at this and, grabbing a heavy brass candlestick from the table, hurled it at Silvio, who just barely managed to duck and avoid getting hit. The rest of us were upset. Silvio stood, pale with anger, his eyes flashing, and said "My dear sir, please leave, and thank God this happened in my house."

None of us doubted what would happen next; we considered our new arrival a dead man already. The officer left, after having said that he was prepared to answer for what had happened in whatever way the esteemed banker desired. The game continued for a few more minutes; but, sensing that our host was no longer interested in playing, we left one after the other and returned to the barracks, discussing all the while what we assumed would be the eminent regimental vacancy.

At riding practice the next day we were asking one another whether or not our poor lieutenant was still among the living, when he appeared. We put the question to him. He answered that he still had no word from Silvio. This astonished us. We went to Silvio's and found him outside, planting bullet after bullet in an ace wedged in the courtyard gate. He received us as usual, without saying a word about the previous night. Three days later, the lieutenant was still alive. Amazed by this, we asked ourselves: was it possible that Silvio wouldn't fight? Silvio didn't fight. He allowed himself to be satisfied by a very weak excuse, and made up with the lieutenant.

This seemed extraordinarily disgraceful of him to the younger soldiers. Young men, who consider bravery the height of human accomplishment, and an excuse for every shortcoming, rarely forgive a

lack of courage. However, little by little the incident was forgotten, and Silvio regained his old influence.

Out of all of us, I was the only one who had a hard time warming to him again. Possessing as I did a naturally romantic imagination, I had felt an unusual connection to this man whose life was a riddle, and who seemed to me to be the hero of a secret tale. He had been fond of me too; at least, it was only in my presence that he dropped his curt manner and talked about things simply and even courteously. But after that unhappy night, the idea that his honor had been sullied, and that he himself had allowed the stain to remain—this idea refused to leave me alone, and prevented me from relaxing with him as I had before. I was ashamed to look at him. Silvio was too intelligent and experienced not to notice my reticence, and he guessed its cause. It seemed to distress him; at the very least I noticed a desire in him to explain himself to me. But I avoided circumstances that would make such a confession possible, and Silvio withdrew. From that point on, I encountered him only among fellow officers, and the intimate conversations we'd had before ended.

People in big cities have no way of understanding the many impressions that are familiar to the residents of the country or of a small town—the excitement of mail day, for example. On Tuesday and Friday our regimental office was filled with officers, some of whom were waiting for money, some for letters, and some for news. Packages were typically opened on the spot and news announced immediately; things were lively. Silvio, who had a regimental address, was usually there. One day someone handed him a letter, the seal of which he tore off with a look of great agitation. His eyes flashed as he read through it. The officers, each of whom was busy with his own letter, paid him no attention. “Gentlemen,” Silvio said to them, “Circumstances demand my immediate departure; I leave tonight; I hope you won’t hesitate to dine at my house one last time. I’ll be expecting you,” he continued; then, turning to me he said, “I’ll definitely be expecting you.” With these words, he left quickly; the rest of us agreed to gather at Silvio’s, and dispersed.

I went to his house at the set time and found almost the entire regiment there. His things were nearly all packed, leaving only the naked, bullet-filled walls. We sat at the table; our host was in high spirits, and soon enough his mood spread; corks popped by the minute, glasses foamed and fizzled continuously, and we wished the departing traveler a good trip and blessings with the greatest possible enthusiasm. It was late already when we stood up to leave. Just as I was about to say goodbye—while the rest of them were sorting out their hats amid a flurry of excuses—Silvio grabbed my hand. “I need to talk to you,” he said quietly. I stayed.

The guests left, and we were alone. We sat across from one another and silently lit our pipes. Silvio seemed preoccupied; his feverish good spirits had vanished. His gloomy paleness, flashing eyes, and the thick smoke coming out of his mouth all worked together to give him a truly

devilish look. After a few minutes he broke the silence.

"We'll probably never meet again," he said to me. "Before I leave I want to explain myself. You've noticed of course that I don't care much what people think of me; but I like you, and I know that it would sit hard with me if I left you with a false impression."

He stopped here to stuff his pipe. I kept quiet, my eyes down.

"It seemed strange to you," he continued, "that I didn't demand satisfaction from that drunken lunatic R***. You agree that, since I had the right to choose the weapon, his life was in my hands, and my own barely in danger at all. I could attribute my restraint to a great soul, but I don't want to lie. If it had been possible for me to punish R*** without any risk to my own life, then I would probably not have forgiven him."

I looked at Silvio with amazement. His confession confused me. Silvio continued:

"The truth is simple: I have no right to expose myself to death. Six years ago I received a slap in the face, and my enemy still lives."

My curiosity was strongly excited by this.

"You didn't fight?" I asked, "Circumstances intervened?"

"I fought," Silvio said, "And here is a souvenir of our duel."

Silvio stood and removed from a hat box a red hat with a gold tassel and galloon (the French call this a *Bonnet de Police*). He put it on; there was a bullet hole in it, a few inches above the forehead.

"You know that I served in the *** Hussars," Silvio continued. "My character is familiar enough to you; I'm accustomed to taking first place. I was like this when I was younger, too. In my time, rowdiness was highly fashionable, and I was the army's premier brawler. My companions and I prided ourselves on our drunkenness: I even drank the famous Burtsov under the table, the one from Denis Davydov's ballads. There was a duel every minute in our regiment and I was in each of them, either as a second, or as the duelist himself. My compatriots worshipped me, while the regimental commanders, who were constantly changing, regarded me as a necessary evil.

"I was quietly (or not so quietly) enjoying my notoriety when a young man from a rich and well-known family (I don't want to say which one) was assigned to us. Never had I met such a brilliant child of fortune! Imagine for yourself: youth, brains, beauty, the most furious happiness, the most carefree bravery, a great name, money, more than he could count, an endless supply of it. You can guess what effect he had on us. My dominance wavered. Attracted by my reputation, the young man sought out my friendship; but I received him coolly, and he immediately removed himself. I loathed him. His success in the regiment and in feminine society threw me into complete despair. I started to look for excuses to quarrel with him; I answered his epigrams with my own (his always seemed sharper and more surprising to me—and more joyful too, of course: while he joked, I cursed). Finally, however, at a ball at the commanding officer's house—upon recognizing him as the object of every woman's affections and

especially the hostess herself, with whom I had previously been having an affair—I spoke a piece of trivial rudeness in his ear. He gasped and slapped me. We fell on our swords, but the women began fainting, and we were pulled apart. That very night, we went to fight.

“It was dawn. I stood at the appointed place with my three seconds. With an indescribable impatience, I awaited my opponent. The spring sun had come up and I could see that it was going to be hot. I caught sight of him in the distance. He was coming on foot, in his uniform and sword, accompanied by one of his seconds. We went to meet one another. He approached, holding a hat filled with cherries. The seconds counted twelve steps off for us. It fell to me to shoot first, but the tumult of my emotions had become so strong that I could not raise my hand steadily, and in order to give myself time to cool off I ceded the first shot to him. My rival did not agree to this. We cast lots: he—fortune’s favorite, as always—got the first number. He took aim and shot my hat off. It was my turn. At last, his life was in my hands; I looked at him intensely, trying to pick out even a shadow of concern. ... He stared down my pistol, taking ripe cherries from his hat and spitting out the pits, which flew at me. His composure sapped my strength. What good was it for me, I thought, to take his life, when even he didn’t value it? Vengeful thoughts flashed through my mind. I dropped the pistol.

“ ‘Death, it seems, is not your lot today,’ I said to him. ‘You may go have breakfast; I won’t detain you.’ ‘You aren’t detaining me in the least,’ he objected. ‘Go ahead, shoot as you wish. The shot remains yours; I am prepared, as always, to be your servant.’ I turned to the second, explaining that I did not intend to shoot now, and that the duel was therefore over.

“I retired from the regiment and moved to this town. Since then, not a single day passes that I don’t think of vengeance. Now my hour has arrived.”

Silvio removed the letter he had received that morning from its envelope and handed it to me to read. Someone (apparently a confidante in these matters) had written him from Moscow that “the well-known person” would soon become the lawful wedded husband of a young and beautiful woman.

“You can easily guess,” Silvio said, “Who this ‘well-known person’ is. I go to Moscow. We will see whether he faces death so composedly now, on the eve of his wedding, as he did before—with a hatful of cherries!”

With these words, Silvio stood, threw his hat to the ground, and began pacing the room like a tiger in a cage. I listened to him without moving, seized by strange and contradictory feelings.

A servant entered and announced that the horses were ready. Silvio grabbed my hand; we kissed. He sat down in the carriage, in which two suitcases lay: one with the pistols, the other with the rest of his belongings. We said goodbye one more time, and the horses galloped off.

II.

Years passed, and domestic circumstances forced me to settle in a poor little village in the N*** district. Even though I was kept busy managing my estate, I couldn't help but sigh quietly for my past life of noise and carelessness. Adjusting to spending the fall and winter nights in complete solitude was even harder. I always found some way to occupy my time until dinner—talking with the village elder, doing errands, or busying myself with new building projects; but as soon as it became dark, I had absolutely no idea what to do with myself. I memorized the few books I managed to find beneath the dresser and in the pantry. I listened to all the stories my housekeeper Kirilov could remember again and again; the songs the old village women sang made me melancholy. I tried drinking home brew, but it gave me a headache; indeed, I confess, I was afraid of becoming a drunken wreck, that is, the most wrecked kind of drunk, many examples of which I saw in my own district. No one lived near me, except for one or two of these wrecks, the majority of whose conversation consisted of hiccups and sighs. Solitude was easier to bear.

There was a rich estate four verst from mine; it belonged to Countess B***, but the estate manager was the only one who lived there; the countess herself had paid a visit only once, during the first year of her marriage, and then only for a month. In the second spring of my seclusion, however, word spread that the countess and her husband would be arriving to spend their summer on the estate. Indeed, they would be there at the beginning of June.

The arrival of a rich neighbor is an important event for people in the country. The landowners and their servants talk about it for two months beforehand and three years afterwards. As for me, I confess, the news that a young and beautiful neighbor would be arriving had a strong effect; I burned with impatience to see her; therefore, on the first Sunday of her stay, I made my way after dinner to *** village to introduce myself as their closest neighbor and most devoted servant.

A valet showed me to the count's study and went in to announce me. The spacious study was furnished in the most luxurious style: bookcases lined the walls, a bronze bust on each of them; a broad mirror hung above a marble mantelpiece; the floor was completely covered with green carpet and strewn with rugs. I grew shy, having come to such luxury from my own poor corner, and having not seen such wonderful wealth for some time. I awaited the count with a kind of trembling, like a provincial solicitor awaiting the minister's entrance. The doors opened, and a handsome man of around thirty-two years came in. The count approached me with an open and friendly look; I tried to buck myself up and introduce myself, but he anticipated me. We sat down. His free and amiable conversation soon dispersed my uncultivated shyness. I had just started to go into the

details of my situation when suddenly the countess came in, and I was even more overcome by amazement than I had been before. Indeed, she was a beauty. The count introduced me, I attempted a free-and-easy manner, but the more I tried to give myself an air of spontaneity, the more awkward I felt. In order to give me time to compose myself and get used to being among new acquaintances, they started talking amongst themselves, treating me without ceremony, like a good neighbor. Meanwhile, I had begun walking back and forth, examining the books and paintings. I don't know anything about painting, but one caught my eye. It was a picture of some kind of Swiss landscape, but what struck me about it was not the portrait itself, but the fact that it had been shot through by a pair of bullets planted one on top of the other.

"That's a good shot," I said, turning to the count.

"Yes," he said. "An extraordinary shot. And do you shoot well?" he continued.

"Tolerably," I answered, happy that the conversation had finally turned to a subject that I knew. "At thirty steps I can hit a card every time, maybe, using a familiar pistol."

"Really?" the countess said, with a look of great surprise. "And you, my dear, can you hit a card at thirty steps?"

"Occasionally," the count answered. "Let's try. I was a good shot in my time; but it's been over four years since I took up a pistol."

"Well," I remarked, "In that case, I'd bet that your Excellency couldn't hit a card even at twenty feet: shooting demands daily practice. I know this from my own experience. My regiment considered me one of its best shots. One time it happened that I didn't touch a pistol for a month; mine were being repaired; and what do you know, your Excellency? The first time I tried to shoot after I'd gotten them back I missed a bottle from twenty-five paces four times in a row. We had a captain, a wit and entertainer, who was there at the time; he said, 'Apparently that bottle's giving you some trouble.' No, your Excellency, you shouldn't neglect practice, otherwise you lose the habit. The best marksman I ever got to meet shot every day three times before dinner, at least. It was a habit of his, like his glass of vodka."

The count and countess were happy that I was talking.

"And how well did he shoot?" the count asked me.

"Well, let's put it this way, your Excellency. Let's say he sees a fly on the wall—you laugh, Countess? It's true, by God. Let's say he sees a fly and shouts: Kuzka, a pistol! Kuzka brings him a loaded pistol. He shoots—bang! And the fly's crushed against the wall!"

"That's amazing," said the count. "What was his name?"

"Silvio, your Excellency."

"Silvio!" shouted the count, jumping up. "You know Silvio?"

"How could I not, your Excellency? I was his good friend; our regiment took him in as a brother in arms. Though it's been five years now since I've heard anything from him. I take it your Excellency

knew him?”

“I knew him, knew him well. Perhaps he told you about it ... but no, I don’t think he would; still, did he ever tell you about a certain strange incident?”

“Like a slap in the face, your Excellency, which he received at a ball from a rogue of some kind?”

“And did he tell you the name of this rogue?”

“No, your Excellency, he didn’t tell me ... Ah! Your Excellency,” I continued, seeing his point, “Excuse me ... I had no idea ... Could it really have been you ...?”

“The very same,” the count answered with a look of extreme discomfort. “And the shot-through painting is a souvenir of our last meeting.”

“My dear,” said the countess, “For God’s sake, don’t go on; it will be terrible for me to hear.”

“No,” the count objected. “I’ll tell everything. He knows how I loathed his friend: he should find out how Silvio took his vengeance on me.”

The count pushed a chair towards me, and, filled with intense curiosity, I listened to the following story.

“I was married five years ago. I passed the first month, the “honeymoon” on this estate. I owe this house the best moments of my life, and one of its hardest memories.

One evening we were travelling together on horseback. My wife’s horse grew obstinate for some reason; she became frightened, gave me the reins and returned home on foot, while I followed behind her. In the courtyard I saw a strange carriage; I was told that a man, who had not wanted to give his name, saying only that he had business with me, was sitting in my study. I went into the study and saw a man with a dusty and over-grown beard in the shadows; he stood right there, by the mantelpiece. I walked up to him, trying to remember where I knew him from. “You don’t recognize me, Count?” he said, in a trembling voice “Silvio!” I shouted, and I confess, I felt as if the hair had suddenly stood up on my head. “The same,” he continued. “You fired at me; I have come to discharge my pistol. Are you prepared?” His pistol was sticking out of his side pocket. I counted off twelve steps and stood there in the corner, asking him to shoot soon, before my wife returned. He took his time, asking for some light. The candles were lit. I locked the door and ordered that no one be admitted. I asked him once again to shoot. He raised his arm and aimed ... I counted the seconds ... I thought of her ... A terrible minute passed! Silvio let his arm drop. “I am afraid,” he said, “That the pistol is not loaded with cherry stones ... the bullets are heavy. All the same, it seems to me that what we have here is not a duel, but a slaughter: I am not accustomed to aiming at an unarmed man. Let’s start over: we’ll cast lots to see who shoots first.” My head was spinning ... I think I objected ... Finally we loaded another pistol; we rolled up a pair of lots; we put them his cap, which I had shot through once. I

drew the better number, again. "You, Count, are devilishly lucky," he said, with a smile that I will never forget. I don't understand why he hated me so much ... but—I shot, and hit here, in this painting. (The Count laid his hand on the shot-through painting. His face was burning as if on fire; the Countess had turned whiter than her dress. I could not keep myself from crying out.)

"I shot," the Count continued, "And I missed, thank God; then it was Silvio's turn ... (he was truly terrible at that moment). He started to take aim at me. Suddenly the door opened, Masha ran in and threw her arms around my neck with a scream. Her presence restored my courage completely—"My dear," I said to her, "Can't you see we're joking? How frightened you are! Sit and drink a glass of water. Here: let me introduce my old friend and comrade." Masha didn't believe a word of it. "Tell me, is it true what my husband says," she said, turning to the frightening Silvio, "Could it be possible that you are only joking?" "He's always joking, Countess," Silvio answered her, "One time, he gave me a slap in the face as a joke, he shot through this hat as a joke, just this moment he shot at me and missed as a joke; now it's my turn to joke ..." With this, he raised his arm as if to take aim at me ... through her! Masha threw herself at his feet. "Get up, Masha, for shame!" I cried in fury, "And you, sir, will you stop mocking the poor woman! Are you going to shoot or not?" "I won't," Silvio answered, "I'm satisfied, I've seen your confusion and timidity; I forced you to shoot at me, that's enough. You'll remember me. I'll give you a souvenir. He paused at the doorway as he was leaving, glanced at the painting I had shot, shot it himself after barely aiming, and vanished. My wife had fainted; no one dared detain him, they looked on him with white-hot terror. He went into the hall, called for his coachman and left, before I could regain my composure."

The count was quiet. By his silence, I could see that the tale whose beginning had so amazed me was over. I have never seen its protagonist again. They say that, during the revolt of Alexander Ipsulant, Silvio led a detachment of Hetarists, and that he was killed at the battle of Skulyan.

THE SNOWSTORM

*"Horses speed along the hill,
Trampling the heavy snow ...
God's house off to one side
Lonely looking*

*

*Suddenly, a snowstorm all around;
Snowflakes falling heavily;
A black raven, its wings whistling,
Drives above the sleigh;
Prophetic wail affirming sadness!
Horses hurry
Peering into the distant darkness,
Shaking their manes".*

—ZHUKOVSKY

Towards the end of 1811—a time we all remember—a good man named Gabriel Gabrielovich R** was living in his home village of Nenarodovo. He was famous throughout the region for his warmth and hospitality; his neighbors visited his house regularly, to eat, drink, play whist for five kopek stakes with his wife, or, in a few cases, to get a look at his daughter Maria Gabrielovna, a sturdy and fair seventeen-year-old. She was considered a catch, and many sought her for themselves or for their sons.

Maria Gabrielovna had been raised on French novels; it should therefore go without saying that she was in love. The object of her affection was a poor ensign, who was staying in his village on leave. Naturally, the young man burned with passions equal to her own. Naturally, too, her parents, who had noticed the pair's burgeoning connection, forbade their daughter even to think about him, and began showing the young ensign an even worse welcome than the one they might have given to a retired land assessor.

Our lovers wrote letters and met daily, alone, in a pine grove or by the old chapel. There they pledged their eternal love to one another, lamented their fate, and discussed various possible plans. Talking and corresponding in this way, they arrived (as can only be expected) at the following thought: if we cannot live together, and the harsh will of our parents prevents our happiness, then isn't it right for us to ignore that will? This happy idea appeared first, of course, in the young man's head; that it was highly appealing to Maria Gabrielovna can be easily guessed.

Winter came and put a stop to their meetings; but their correspondence only grew livelier. In letter after letter, Vladimir Nikolaevich begged Maria Gabrielovna to give herself to him, to marry

him in secret, to hide for a period of time and then, when this time was over, to throw herself at her parents' feet, at which point they would of course be so touched by the unhappy lovers' heroic devotion that they would certainly say to them, "Children! Come back to us!"

Maria Gabrielovna hesitated for a long time. Most of the plans for elopement were rejected. Finally she agreed: on the designated day she would forgo dinner and retire to her room under the pretence of a headache. Her maid, who was in on the plan, would accompany her through a back exit to the garden, where they would find a sled prepared to take them from Nenarodovo to the village of Zhadrino, a distance of five verst, and then straight to the church. Vladimir himself would be waiting there for them.

The night before it was all set to happen, Maria didn't sleep; she packed, tied up her underclothes and dress and then wrote two letters: one long one to a sentimental lady friend and another to her parents. She said goodbye to them with the most heartfelt expressions, excusing herself due to the irresistible passions that were forcing her hand, and concluding, moreover, that the happiest moment of her life would come when she was permitted to throw herself at the feet of her dear, dear parents. After sealing both letters with a Tula signet ring—two flaming hearts above an appropriate inscription—she collapsed on her bed just as dawn was breaking and began to doze off. But horrible dreams kept her from sleeping soundly. It seemed that the moment she got in the sleigh and prepared to set off for the wedding her father rose up with terrible speed, stopped her, pulled her out onto the snow, and then threw her into a dark and bottomless pit... she fell swiftly, her heart sinking indescribably. Next she saw Vladimir lying on the grass, pale and bloodstained. As he died, he prayed to her in a piercing voice to sleep with him as a wife ... other misshaped, senseless apparitions dragged themselves past her one after the other. At last she woke up, paler than usual and with a real headache. Her mother and father noticed how uncomfortable she was. Their tender concern and incessant questioning ("What's the matter, Masha? Are you sick Masha?") wrenched her heart. She tried to calm them, but couldn't. Night came. The idea that she was spending her last day with her family was awful to her. She was barely alive. Secretly, she was saying goodbye to everyone, to everything she saw around her.

When dinner was served, Maria's heart started beating strongly. In a trembling voice she explained that she didn't want to eat dinner, and stood up to say goodnight to her father and mother. They kissed her and blessed her the way they always did; she just barely stopped herself from crying. Back in her room, she threw herself into an armchair and burst into tears. Her maid calmed her down and told her to take heart. Everything was ready. Half an hour later she would be leaving behind forever her parents' house, her room, her quiet girlhood ... Outside there was a storm; the wind was howling, the shutters knocked and shook; all of which seemed to her a sad sign of things to come. Soon everything in the house had quieted down and

gone to sleep. Masha wrapped her shawl around herself, put on a warm cloak, grabbed her hope chest and went to the rearmost hall. The maid carried the two bundles for her. They went into the garden. The storm had not abated; the wind met them head on, as if trying to stop the rash young woman. It was difficult for her to make it across the garden. The sleigh was waiting for them on the road. The horses, who were freezing, refused to stand still; Vladimir's coach-driver was walking around in front of the sleigh-shafts trying to restrain them. He helped the young woman and her maid take their seats, packed up the bundles and chest and took up the reins, and the horses took off. Having given our lady over to her fate, not to mention the skillful hands of a coach-driver named Tereshka, we will now turn to our young lover.

Vladimir had been riding all day. He had met with the Zhadrino priest in the morning; settling things with him was tricky. After that he went around to try and find some witnesses among the neighboring landowners. The first person he presented himself to, a forty-year-old, retired cornet named Dravin, readily agreed. It was an adventure, he said, that reminded him of the good old days and Hussar pranks. He persuaded Vladimir to stay for lunch, assuring him that the two other witnesses would not be hard to find. Indeed, immediately after lunch a surveyor named Smith appeared sporting spurs and a moustache, as well as the son of the district police chief, a sixteen year old boy who had enlisted not long ago in the light cavalry. They not only accepted Vladimir's offer but even swore that they were ready to sacrifice themselves for his life. Vladimir embraced them passionately and set off for home to get ready.

It had been dark for some time. He sent the reliable Tereshka to Nenarodovo with his troika and detailed, thorough instructions; ordered a small one-horse sleigh to be harnessed for himself; and then set off alone, without a driver, to Zhadirino, where in two hours Maria Gabrielovna would be arriving. He knew the road; the entire trip would take twenty minutes at most.

Hardly had Vladimir passed from the outskirts of the town to the fields, however, when the wind rose up and whipped itself into such a storm that it became impossible to see anything. Within minutes the road was covered in snow; his surroundings disappeared in a dark and yellowish haze, through which white snowflakes flew. The sky and the ground merged. Vladimir, who found himself in a field, tried in vain to get back on the road; his horse stepped forward randomly over and over again, now making his way up a snow bank, now falling into a hole. Again and again the sleigh overturned. Vladimir focused only on not losing the true path. But it seemed to him that a half hour had already passed without his reaching even Zhadrin grove. About ten more minutes went by; still no sign of the grove. Vladimir rode through a field that was cut across by deep ravines. The storm was not abating, the sky had not cleared. The horse began to grow tired; Vladimir's sweat was coming thick and heavy, despite the fact that he

had gradually sunk belt-deep in the snow.

Finally, he realized that he was going the wrong way. Vladimir stopped: he began to think, to remember, to consider. He decided that he had to go to the right. He went to the right. His horse was practically falling over. He had been on the road for over an hour already. Zhadrino could not be that much further. But he continued, on and on, without reaching the end of the field. Everything was snowdrifts and ravines; again and again the sleigh fell over, again and again he set it straight. Time passed. Vladimir began to get very worried.

Finally something dark came into view somewhere off to the side. Vladimir turned toward it. As he drew closer, he saw a grove. Thank God, he thought, now I'm close. He went around the grove, hoping in this way to find some sign of the road or to make his way to the other side; that's where Zhadrino would be. Soon he found the road and pushed forward into the darkness of the trees, which the winter had stripped bare. The wind couldn't rage as much here. The road was even. The horse perked up, and Vladimir felt better.

But he continued, on and on, and Zhadrino was nowhere to be seen; the grove did not end. Vladimir saw in terror that he was now travelling in an unknown forest. Despair overcame him. He struck the horse; the poor animal began trotting, but soon stopped and then after fifteen minutes was moving one step at a time, paying no attention to the unhappy Vladimir.

Little by little the trees began to thin, and Vladimir made it out of the wood. Zhadrina was still nowhere to be seen. It had to have been around midnight. Tears streamed from his eyes; he proceeded in a random direction. The weather quieted down, the clouds dispersed, a plain lay before him, a moving carpet of white. The night was quite clear. He saw a small village in the distance, made up of four or five houses. Vladimir headed towards them. When he reached the first little hut he jumped out of his sled, ran up to the window and began knocking. After a few minutes the wooden shutter opened and an old man stuck his gray beard out. "What do you want?" "Is Zhadrina far?" "Zhadrina? Is it far?" "Yes, yes! Is it far?" "Not far; ten verst or so." Hearing this answer, Vladimir grabbed his hair and stood without moving, like a man who had just been sentenced to death.

"So where are you coming from?" the old man continued. Vladimir couldn't bring himself to answer the question. "Old man," he said, "Could you get me horses for Zhadrino?" "We have some horses," the man answered. "And how about a guide? I can pay whatever he wants." "Hold on," the old man said, lowering the shutter, "I'll get my son; he'll lead you there." Vladimir sat down to wait. But after a few minutes, he started knocking again. The shutter went up, the beard appeared. "What do you want?" "What about your son?" "He'll be out soon. He's putting his boots on. You're cold, maybe? Come in and warm yourself." "Thank you, please tell your son to hurry,"

Gates creaked; the boy emerged carrying his stick. He walked in front, following the road when he could and finding it when it was covered by snowdrifts. "What time is it?" Vladimir asked him. "It'll be dawn soon," the young man answered. Vladimir didn't say another word.

The roosters were crowing and it had already grown light when they reached Zhadrino. The church was locked. Vladimir paid his guide and crossed the yard to where the priest lived. His troika was not in its yard. What news was waiting for him!

But let's return to our good family of Nenarodovo landowners, and see what they're doing, shall we?

And ... nothing.

The old man and woman woke up and went into their living room. Garbriel Gabrielovich was in a nightcap and flannel jacket, Praskovya Petrovna in a padded dressing gown. They put the samovar on, and Gabriel Gabrielovich sent a maid to check on Maria Gabrielovna, to see how she was feeling and how she had slept. The maid returned, and explained that Milady had slept poorly, but that she was feeling a bit better and would soon come to the drawing room. At last, the door opened and Maria Gabrielovna came in to greet her mama and papa.

"How's your head, Masha?" asked Gabriel Gabrielovich. "Better, daddy," Masha answered. "Maybe you had a headache from the charcoal smoke yesterday, Masha," said Praskovaya Petrovna. "Maybe, mama," Masha answered.

The day proceeded well enough, but at night Masha grew sick. They sent to town for the doctor. He arrived that evening and found the patient in a fit. A strong fever broke out, and for two weeks Maria was at death's door.

No one in the house knew about the planned elopement. The letters that she had written the night before were burned; her maid, who feared the master's wrath, didn't say anything to anyone. The priest, the retired cornet, the surveyor with the moustache, and the young cavalryman kept quiet—and for good reason. The coach-driver Tereshka never uttered a word, even when drunk. In this way, the secret was kept by over a half dozen conspirators. But it was Maria Gabrielovna herself, in the unabated fever, who ended up telling her own secret. However, her words however were so garbled that her mother, who had not stirred from her bedside, could understand from them only that her daughter was fatally in love with Vladimir Nikolaevich, and that this love, probably, was the cause of her illness. She spoke with her husband and a few of the neighbors, all of whom agreed finally and in chorus that this was clearly Maria Gabrielovna's fate, that no horse could outrun destiny, that poverty was not a crime, that one lived with the man and not the money, and so on—words of wisdom being remarkably handy in those moments when we need to justify our actions, but have little reason to do so.

Meanwhile, the lady in question was recovering. Vladimir hadn't been seen in Gabriel Gabrielovich's house for a while. He was afraid of

getting the usual reception. They decided to send for him in order to explain his unexpected good luck: they had agreed to a wedding. But imagine the Nenarodovo landowner's amazement when they received, in answer to their invitation, a half-crazed letter! He explained to them that he would never set foot in their house, and asked them to forget about the unhappy man, whose only hope now was for death. A few days later they learned that Vladimir had enlisted. The year was 1812.

For a long time, they didn't dare reveal this to the recovering Masha. She hadn't mentioned Vladimir once. A few months had already passed when, finding his name in a list of those distinguished or heavily wounded at Borodino, she fell into a swoon, which made them fear that her fever might return. But the swoon had no further effect, thank God.

A further misfortune visited her: Gabriel Gabrielovich died, naming her the heiress to his entire estate. But the inheritance was no comfort to her. She shared poor Praskovaya Petrovna's sincere grief, and vowed never to abandon her. Both of them left Nenarodovo, the place of sad memories, and went to live in the village of ***.

Suitors now swarmed the beautiful and wealthy young lady; but she gave them not the slightest hope. Her mother sometimes urged her to choose a beloved for herself; Maria Gabrielovna shook her head and grew thoughtful. By this point Vladimir was no more: he had died in Moscow, on the eve of the French invasion. The memory of him was holy to Masha; at least she cherished everything that reminded her of him: books he had never finished, his drawings, notes and the verses he had copied out for her. The neighbors, who knew the whole story, were amazed by her constancy, and awaited with bated breath the hero whose destiny it would be to triumph at last over the said faith of this virginal Artemesia.

Meanwhile, the war had ended gloriously. Our regiments were returning from abroad. The people were running to meet them. Musicians were playing war songs; "Vive Henri-Quatre," Tyrolean waltzes, and arias from *Jacoda*. The officers, who had left for the campaign as boys, were returning matured by the air of battle and decorated with crosses. The soldiers talked happily amongst themselves, peppering their talk with German and French words. An unforgettable time! A time of glory and passion! How quickly the Russian heart beat at the word *fatherland*! How sweet were the tears of reunion! How excited we all were to unite a feeling of pride in our homeland with love for our sovereign! And what a moment for him!

Women, Russian women, had no peers at that time. Their usual frigidity disappeared. Their delight was truly ravishing when, meeting the conquering heroes, they shouted hooray, "And threw their bonnets in the air." Would any of the officers of that period have dared to disagree that Russian women were his best, his most treasured reward?

Maria Gabrielovna lived with her mother in the *** province during that glorious time and therefore did not see how both capitals were

welcoming the returning soldiers. However, in the country and villages the prevailing enthusiasm was perhaps even stronger. In these places, the appearance of a soldier was a real triumph. A lover in a tail-coat paled in comparison.

We have said already that Maria Gabrielovna was surrounded by suitors, despite her coldness. But all of them had to take a step back when the wounded hussar lieutenant Burmin—who had the Order of George in his buttonhole, and possessed an *intriguing paleness*, as the local ladies put it—appeared in her home. He was around twenty-six years old. He had come to take a furlough on his estate, which was located in the village neighboring Maria Gabrielovna's. Maria Gabrielovna paid him quite a bit of attention. Her usually pensive attitude perked up when he was around. It could not be said that she flirted with him; but a poet, seeing her behavior, might have said, "*Se amor non e che dunque ...?*"

By all accounts Burmin was a very nice young man. He had exactly the kind of mind that women like: decorous, controlled, lightly amusing but without any pretensions. His relationship with Maria Gabrielovna was simple and unconstrained; but no matter what she said or did, his eyes and thoughts followed her. He seemed to have a quiet and shy temper, but the gossips maintained that he had been a real ham at one time, and this did him no harm in the opinion of Maria Gabrielovna who (like most young women) gladly excused mischief, displays of daring, and enthusiasm.

But more than anything (more than his delicacy, more than his delightful conversation, more than his intriguing paleness, more than his bandaged-up hands) the silence of the young Hussar excited her curiosity and imagination. She had no doubt that she liked him a lot; probably he too, with his intelligence and experience, had already noticed how much she favored him: why, then, hadn't she seen him lying at her feet? Why hadn't she heard his confession? What was holding him back? Shyness, inseparable from true love, or pride, or the tricking coquettishness of the ladies' man? It was a riddle to her. After thinking things over thoroughly, she decided that shyness was the sole cause, and proceeded to encourage him with increased attention and, depending on the situation, even tenderness. She was setting the stage for a most unexpected ending, and waited impatiently for the minute when he would explain his romantic feelings for her. A secret, no matter what kind, is always distressing to a woman's heart. Her maneuvering achieved its aim: at last Burmin fell into a reverie, and his black eyes began to linger on Maria Gabrielovna with the kind of fire that indicated, it seemed, an approaching moment of decision. The neighbors spoke of the wedding as if it had already happened, and the good Praskaya Petrovna rejoiced that her daughter had finally found herself an adequate fiancé.

One day the old lady was sitting alone in the parlor dealing out her game of patience, when Burmin came in and immediately inquired after Maria Gabrielovna. "She's in the garden," answered the old

woman. "Go to her; I'll wait for you here." Burmin went, and the old woman crossed herself and thought: today, perhaps, it will all be over!

Burmin found Maria Gabrielovna by the pond, beneath a willow, in a white dress and with a book in her lap: like the heroine, truth be told, of some romantic novel. After some initial questions Maria Gabrielovna deliberately stopped talking, increasing thereby the mutual embarrassment from which it would be possible to escape only with a sudden and decisive explanation. And so it happened: Burmin, feeling the awkwardness of his situation, declared that he had been waiting a long time for a chance to open his heart to her, and that he desired a few moments of her attention. Maria Gabrielovna closed her book and lowered her eyes as a sign of compliance.

"I love you," Burmin said. "I love you terribly ..." (Maria Gabrielovna blushed and lowered her head even further). "I have proceeded carelessly, allowing myself to develop a sweet habit, the habit of seeing and listening to you every day ..." (Maria Gabrielovna recalled the first letter of St. Preux). "It is already too late to resist my fate; from now on the memory of you, your sweet, incomparable image will be my life's torture and delight; but I have a heavy obligation left, to reveal my terrible secret to you and to lay between us an insurmountable obstacle ..." "It has always been there," interrupted Maria Gabrielovna passionately, "I could never have been your wife ..." "I know," he answered quietly. "I know you never loved me, but death and three years of mourning ... oh good, kind Maria Gabrielovna! Don't try to deny me a last comfort: the thought that you would have agreed to give me my happiness, if only ... but keep quiet, for the love of God, keep quiet! You are torturing me. Yes, I know, I feel that you might have been mine, but—I must confess, unhappily ... I am married!"

Maria Gabrielovna looked at him in surprise.

"I am married," Burmin continued. "I have been married for years already and I don't know who my wife is, or where she is, or if I will ever see her again!"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Maria Gabrielovna, "How strange this is! Continue; I will talk afterwards ... but keep going, please."

"In the beginning of 1812," Burmin said, "I was rushing to Vilno, where my regiment was stationed. Arriving late one night at a station, I began harnessing my horses, when suddenly a terrible storm rose up; the stationmaster and my coachman advised me to stop. I took their advice, but was overcome by an incomprehensible anxiety; it felt as if someone were urging me to keep going. Meanwhile the storm had not abated; I couldn't bear it any longer; I ordered my horses to be harnessed again and headed out into the heart of the storm. The driver took it into his head to travel along the frozen river, which would have shortened our trip by three verst. The banks were covered in snow; the driver passed the place where we were supposed to get back on the road, and in this way we found ourselves in an unfamiliar area. The storm hadn't died down; I spotted a small fire and ordered that we

make for it. We entered a village; the fire was in the village church. The church was open, there were some sleighs in the yard; a few people were milling around on the church porch. 'This way! This way!' a few of the voices shouted. 'For goodness' sake, where have you been?' someone said to me. 'The bride has fainted; the priest doesn't know what to do; we were ready to turn around and go home. Quickly—come on.' I jumped from my sleigh without a word and went into the church, which was faintly lit by two or three candles. A young woman was sitting on a bench in a dark corner of the church; another was massaging her temples. 'Thank God,' this one said, 'You've come at last. You've practically killed Milady.' The old priest approached me and asked: 'Are you ready to begin?' 'Begin, begin, father,' I said in annoyance. They picked up the young woman. She seemed not bad-looking to me ... an incomprehensible, unforgivable recklessness ... I stood next to her before the pulpit: the priest was hurrying; three men and a nurse held the bride up and kept themselves occupied solely with her. We were married. 'Kiss,' they told us. My wife turned her pale face to me. I wanted to kiss her ... She screamed: 'Oh, not him! It's not him!' and fell unconscious. The witnesses fixed terrified eyes on me. I turned, left the church without anyone stopping me, threw myself in the sleigh and shouted: 'Go!'

"My God!" cried Maria Gabrielovna, "And you have no idea what happened to your poor wife?"

"No idea," Burmin answered. "No idea what the name of the village is, where I was married; I don't remember what station I stopped at. At that time I considered my terrible prank so insignificant that I fell asleep after leaving the church, and woke up the next morning three stations away. The serf that was attending me then died in the campaign, and because of this I had no hope of finding that person on whom I had played such a terrible trick, and who now, in such a terrible way, is avenged."

"My God, my God!" said Maria Gabrielovna, grabbing his hand. "Then it was you! You don't recognize me?"

Burmin grew pale ... and threw himself at her feet.

THE UNDERTAKER

*“Don’t we see coffins everyday,
The grey hair of a world past its prime?”*

—DERZHAVIN

The last of Adrian Prokhovorich’s things were loaded onto the hearse, and the scraggy pair of horses dragged themselves, for the fourth time, from Basmanya street to Nikitska street, where the undertaker was moving his entire household. After locking the shop up he nailed a sign to the gate, announcing that the house was for sale or rent, and set off on foot for his new home. As he approached the yellow building that had tempted his imagination for so long, and which he had purchased at last for a considerable sum, the old undertaker was surprised to find that his heart was not glad. Stepping over the unfamiliar threshold and seeing the disarray of his new home, he sighed for the decrepit little shack where he had established, over the course of eighteen years, the strictest order. He began scolding both his daughters and the maids for their sluggishness, and set to helping them. Soon he had arranged things; the icon case with its icons, the dresser with its dishes, the table, divan and bed were all installed in their proper places in the rear room; the master’s inventory was placed in the kitchen and parlor: coffins of all colors and sizes, as well as cupboards with mourning hats, cloaks and torches. A sign hung over the entranceway, depicting a fat little Cupid with an upside-down torch in his hand, above the inscription: “Plain or painted coffins sold and upholstered here. Also hired out and repaired.” The girls retired to their room, which was clean and bright. Adrian looked things over, took a seat by the window and ordered the samovar to be put on.

The enlightened reader knows that both Shakespeare and Walter Scott depict their undertakers as funny, cheerful men in order to more strongly strike our imaginations with the contrast. Out of respect for the truth we are unable to follow their example, and must confess that the gloominess of our undertaker’s profession and that of his character corresponded completely. Adrian Prokhovorich was, for the most part, sullen and pensive. He broke his silence only to yell at his daughters when they stared idly at the people walking past the window, or to offer an exaggerated price to someone whose bad luck (or, occasionally, joy) caused them to be in need of his services. So on this occasion too Adrian sat beneath his window drinking his seventh cup of tea, immersed as usual in unhappy thoughts. He was thinking about the pouring rain which, one week earlier, had met a retired brigadier’s hearse at the city gates. Many cloaks had shrunk because of this, many hats warped. He foresaw unavoidable expenses, for by the time his old stock of funeral wear reached him it was in pitiful condition. He was

hoping to recoup the loss with the help of old merchant's widow, Tryuhin, who had been on the verge of death for almost a year now. But Tryuhin was dying in Razgulya, and Prokhovorich feared that her heirs, disregarding their promises to her, would be too lazy to send for him over such a distance, and would come to an arrangement with someone closer.

These thoughts were interrupted by the unexpected sound of a freemason's triple knock at the door. "Who's there?" asked the undertaker. The door opened, and a man, immediately recognizable as a German artisan, entered the room and approached with a friendly smile on his face. "Excuse me, dear neighbor," he said, with the kind of accent that even now no Russian can hear without laughing, "Excuse me, if I am disturbing you ... I wished to make your acquaintance as quickly as possible. I am a boot-maker, name of Gottlib Shultz, and I live across the street from you, in that little house facing your windows. Tomorrow is a celebration of my silver wedding anniversary, and I would like to invite you and your daughters to celebrate with me, as friends do." The invitation was favorably received. The undertaker asked the boot-maker to sit and have a cup of tea, and thanks to Gottlib Shultz's open manner they were soon talking things over amiably. "How, sir, is your business going?" Adrian asked. "Eh," answered Shultz. "A little of this and a little of that. I can't complain. Though of course, my goods are not like yours: a man can live without boots, but a corpse can't live without his coffin." "True, essentially," remarked Adrian. "However, if a man cannot afford boots, then, if you don't mind my saying so, he must go barefoot. A dead beggar, on the other hand, gets his coffin for free." The conversation continued in this way for a little while longer; finally the boot-maker stood and, after repeating his invitation, took his leave of the undertaker.

The next day, at twelve o'clock sharp, the undertaker and his daughters left their new house through the side gate and made their way to the neighbor's. At this point I am going to deviate from the pleasing conventions of current-day novelists by describing neither the Russian caftan worn by Adrian Prohorov, nor the European outfits of Akulina and Darya. I suppose, however, that it is not inappropriate to say that both women wore yellow hats and red shoes, which they did only on special occasions.

The bootmaker's cramped little apartment was full of guests, the majority of which were German artisans with their wives and apprentices. The only man present from the ranks of the Russian governmental service was Yurko the Finn, who had gained his host's special favor despite his humble title. He had served his post truly and faithfully for twenty-five years, like the postmaster from Pogorelsky's novel. The fire of 1812, which demolished the first capital, destroyed his yellow sentry-box as well. But as soon as the enemies were chased away a new, gray box, with white Doric columns appeared in the place where the old one had been, and Yurko once again began to pace back

and forth in front of it “with his pole-axe and heavy coat.” Most of the Germans living around Nikitsky Gate knew him: some had even had occasion to spend a Sunday night at Yurko’s. Adrian immediately made the acquaintance of this man, who gave the impression of being someone who might someday prove useful, and when the guests went in to the table, they sat together. Mister and Misses Shultz and their daughter, the seventeen-year-old Lottie, who were eating along with the guests, also passed the food around and helped the cook serve. The beer flowed. Yurko ate for four; Adrian did no less. His daughters were somewhat more modest. The conversation, which was in German, grew louder by the minute. Suddenly the host demanded everyone’s attention and, uncorking a tar-capped bottle, pronounced loudly, in Russian: “To the health of my good Louise!” The sparkling wine started to foam over. The host kissed the face of his companion of forty years tenderly, and the guests drank a loud toast to the health of the good Louise. “To the health of my beloved guests!” proclaimed the host, uncorking a second bottle—and the guests cheered him and thanked him, draining their glasses once again. Now the toasts began to follow one after the other; they drank a toast to Moscow and to a full dozen small German towns; they drank a toast to the guilds in general and then to each guild in particular; they drank a toast to master craftsmen and to apprentices. Adrian drank heartily and became so happy that he decided to propose his own funny toast. Suddenly one of the guests, a portly baker, raised his glass and shouted: “To the health of those we work for, *unserer Kundleute!*”[†] The proposal was received gladly and unanimously, as each of the others had been. The guests began bowing to one another, the tailor to the bootmaker, the bootmaker to the tailor, the baker to both of them, everybody to the baker, and so on. In the middle of all this mutual bowing, Yurko turned to his neighbor and shouted, “Well? Drink, sir, to the health of your corpses.” Everyone started laughing but the undertaker considered himself insulted, and frowned. Nobody noticed this; the guests kept on drinking, and the vesper-bells were already ringing when the company stood from the table.

The guests left late, and for the most part drunk. The portly baker and the bookbinder, whose face “*seemed bound in red Moroccan leather ...*” led Yurko by the hand to his sentry box, observing, on this occasion, the Russian proverb that “One good turn deserves another.” The undertaker returned home drunk and angry. “What was that supposed to be?” he debated out loud, “How is my profession any less honorable than their’s? Is the undertaker really brother to the executioner? What are those heathens laughing at? Is an undertaker just a jack in the box? I was going to invite them into my new home, to give them a mountainous feast: not any more! I’ll send out an invitation, but it’ll be to my patrons: the true believing dead.” “What’s that, sir?” said the young servant, who was taking off the undertaker’s shoes at that moment. “What did you say? Cross your heart! Invite the dead to your new house! That’s terrible!” “With God as my witness I

will invite them,” Adrian continued. “Tomorrow. I am pleased to announce, my dear sirs, that tomorrow I am going to have a feast. I will serve you all that God has sent me.” With these words the undertaker got into bed and was soon snoring.

It was still dark outside when Adrian woke up. Tryuhin the merchant’s widow had died that very night, and a special envoy from her steward arrived on horseback with the news. The undertaker tipped him ten kopeks, dressed quickly, and took a cab to Razgulyan. The police were already posted out front, and the merchants milled around at the gates of the deceased woman’s house, like crows that had caught a whiff of a corpse. The deceased woman lay on the table, yellow as wax, though still untouched by the disfigurement of decomposition. Relatives, neighbors and servants crowded around her. All the windows were open; candles burned; priests were reading prayers. Adrian went up to Tryuhin’s nephew, a young merchant in a fashionable frock coat, and explained to him that the coffin, candles, pall and other funerary necessities would be immediately supplied, by him, and in excellent condition. The heir thanked him distractedly, saying that the price did not worry him, and that he would rely completely on the undertaker’s conscience. The undertaker, as he usually did, swore that he would take nothing more than his due; he exchanged a discreet and knowing glance with his assistant and left to make arrangements. All day he drove back and forth between Razgulyan and the Nikitski Gate; by evening everything was settled; he dismissed his cab driver and walked home. It was a moonlit night. The undertaker got as far as the Nikitsky Gate without encountering any problems. By the Church of the Ascension our friend Yurko called out to him and, recognizing the undertaker, wished him a good night. It was late. The undertaker was just approaching his house when suddenly it seemed to him that he saw someone walk up to his gate, open the side gate, and then disappear inside. “What could that be?” thought Adrian. “Someone needs me again? Maybe a thief wants to rob me? One of my little idiots’ lovers? Anything’s possible!” The undertaker thought about calling his friend Yurko for help. At that moment someone else came up to the side gate and prepared to enter but, catching sight of the master of the house running towards him, stood still and removed his three-cornered hat. His face seemed familiar to Adrian, but in his haste he could not get a good look at him. “You must excuse me,” Adrian said, out of breath. “Come in, make yourself at home.” “Don’t stand on ceremony, sir,” answered the man in a hollow voice, “Go first; step forward quickly and show your guests the path.” Indeed, Adrian had no time to stand on ceremony. The side gate was unlocked; he climbed the stairs, and the man followed after him. It seemed to Adrian that there were people milling around in his house. “What the Devil!” he thought, and rushed inside ... at which point his legs gave way beneath him. The room was full of corpses. The moonlight streaming through the window illuminated their blue and yellow faces, their sunken mouths, their

cloudy, half-closed eyes and jutting noses. With horror, Adrian recognized among them people that he had buried; he saw that the guest who had entered with him was the brigadier who had been buried in the pouring rain. All of them, women and men, surrounded the undertaker, hailing him with greetings and bows, except for one poor soul who, bashful and ashamed of his rags, did not approach, but stood shyly in a corner. All the others were well dressed: the lady corpses in caps and ribbons, the gentlemen corpses of the official class in uniforms, but with their beards unshaven, the merchants in their holiday tunics. "So you see, Prokhovorich," said the brigadier, who spoke for the whole company, "We all rose at your invitation; the only ones still at home are those who are simply unable, who have gone all to pieces, yes, those who have only bones left, no skin—but even one of these was unable to restrain himself, so much did he want to see you." At that point a small skeleton shoved its way through the crowd and drew near Adrian. His skull smiled at the undertaker tenderly. Scraps of bright green and red broadcloth and decrepit linen hung off him here and there, and the bones of his feet knocked in their jackboots, like pestles in mortars. "You don't recognize me, Prokhovorich," the skeleton said. "Do you remember the retired sergeant at arms Peter Petrovich Kurilkin, the very one to whom, in the year 1799, you sold your first coffin—pretending it was oak instead of pine, no less?" With these words, the corpse attempted a bony embrace—but Adrian, gathering all his strength, pushed him off. Peter Petrovich staggered, fell and shattered into pieces. A murmur of disapproval arose among the corpses; all of them stood in defense of their comrade's honor, hurling curses and threats at Adrian. The poor host, deafened by their cries and practically knocked to the ground, lost all presence of mind, fell on the bones of the retired sergeant at arms and fainted.

The sun had already been shining on the undertaker's bed for some time. Finally, he opened his eyes and saw his maid before him, blowing on the samovar coals. Adrian recalled all of the previous night's events. The widow Tryuhin, the brigadier and sergeant Kurilkin floated hazily through his mind. He waited quietly, hoping that the maid might start talking to him and thereby shed some light on what had happened last night.

"What a long sleep, mister Adrian Prokhovorich," said Aksinya, handing him his dressing gown. "Your neighbor the tailor called on you, and the sentry ran over to explain that today is the district police inspector's name day, but you were sleeping so soundly that we didn't want to wake you up."

"And did the dead widow Tryuhin come to see me?"

"Dead? So she died, did she?"

"You fool! Didn't you help me give her funeral yesterday?"

"But really, sir, what is this all about? Have you completely lost your mind, or did you get drunk last night? What 'yesterday's funeral'? You spent all day feasting with the Germans, came home drunk, fell

into bed, and then slept until now, even though the bells have already rung for mass.”

“Is it possible?” said the happy undertaker.

“Of course,” answered the maid.

“Well, in that case, let’s have that tea a little quicker. And summon my daughters.”

† “Our clients” [German]

THE STATIONMASTER

*“Collegiate administrator,
Postal dictator”.*

—KING VYAZEMSKY

Who has never cursed stationmasters? Who has never argued with them? Who, in a moment of anger, has not demanded from them the fatal ledger, in order to record his useless complaint against their pretensions, rudeness, and carelessness? Who does not consider them outcasts from humanity, no better than the old Moscow law clerks, or the robbers of Muromets? We, however, are going to be fair, by trying to look at circumstances from their point of view, and thereby perhaps come to judge them a little more leniently. What is this “stationmaster?” A martyr of the 14th rank, essentially, protected from beatings by his title only, and not always even then (I appeal to my reader’s conscience on this point). What are the duties of this dictator, as Vyazemsky called him? Do they not truly amount to a prison sentence? Day and night, not a minute’s rest. The traveler takes out all the grief accumulated over the course of his tedious journey on the stationmaster. The weather is impossible, the road terrible, the driver stubborn, the horses won’t go—it’s the stationmaster’s fault. Entering his poor quarters, the traveler looks on him as an enemy; things are good if the host can rid himself of his undesired guest quickly; but if there are no horses available? Good lord! What curses, what threats fall on his head! Come rain or sleet he must run around outdoors; in the storm, in the frosts of Epiphany-day he goes out onto his porch, just to grab a minute’s rest from the cries and shoves of his irritated guests. Here comes a general; the trembling stationmaster gives him the last two troikas, including the courier’s. The general leaves without thanking him. Five minutes later—the bell! The courier throws an order for fresh horses on his desk! If we try to comprehend all of this, our hearts will be flooded with sincere sympathy, rather than indignation. A few words more: over the course of twenty years I have traveled all over Russia, in all directions; I know almost all the postal routes; I am acquainted with more than one generation of drivers; it is rare that I do not recognize a stationmaster’s face, I’ve missed only a few of them; in the near future, I hope to publish an interesting collection of my travel observations; in the meantime, I will only say that, as a group, stationmasters prove the accepted opinion to be most false. The much-maligned stationmasters are for the most part worldly men, obliging by nature, inclined to affability, modest when it comes to the expectation of honors, and not particularly money-grubbing. From their conversation (to which, by the way, most travelers pay no attention) one can garner many interesting and

instructive things. As for myself, well, I must confess that I prefer their talk to the blather of an official of the 6th rank traveling on administrative business.

It is no doubt easy to guess that I have a friend among the stationmasters' ranks. Indeed, the memory of one in particular is dear to me. Circumstances brought us together once, and it is concerning this very event that I want now to talk with my dear reader.

In May of 1816 I happened to be traveling through *** province, along a route that has now fallen into disuse. Being of low rank at the time, I traveled by post, using my traveling allowance to hire a pair of horses at each stage. Because of this stationmasters did not stand on ceremony with me, and I frequently had to take by force that which, in my opinion, I was rightfully owed. Being young and quick-tempered, I grew indignant at the baseness and small-heartedness of the stationmaster who gave the troika that he had prepared for me to a high-ranking barin† It took me a long time to get used to the fact that a pretentious servant at a governor's lunch might pass me by without serving me a plate. Nowadays, both ways of acting seem perfectly natural to me. Indeed, what would happen to us if, instead of the rule *rank must respect rank*—which is convenient for everyone—we introduced another, for example *mind must respect mind*? What arguments would ensue! And to whom would the servant serve the first plate? I will return to my story.

The day was hot. Three verst from *** station it began to drizzle, and within a minute pouring rain had soaked me to my last thread. Upon arriving at the station my concerns were, first, to change out of my clothes as quickly as possible, and second, to find some tea. "Hey, Dunya," the stationmaster shouted, "Put the samovar on! And fetch some cream!" At these words a fourteen-year-old girl came out from behind the partition and ran onto the porch. Her beauty astonished me. "That's your daughter?" I asked the stationmaster. "My daughter," he answered with a self-satisfied look. "Clever and quick, like her late mother." He began copying out my order for fresh horses, while I occupied myself inspecting the little pictures that decorated his humble but tidy quarters. They told the story of the prodigal son: in the first, a respectable-looking old man in a nightcap dressing gown saw off a rambunctious youth, who hastily received his blessings and a money pouch. In the next, the young man's dissolution was depicted in bright strokes: he was shown sitting at a table, surrounded by false friends and shameless women. Further along, the profligate youth in rags and a tri-corner cap tended pigs, sharing their meal with them; his face expressed deep sadness and repentance. The last picture depicted his return to his father; the good old man ran out to meet him in the very same night cap and dressing gown: the prodigal son fell to his knees; in the background a cook was killing a fattened calf, and the oldest son was asking a servant what all the rejoicing was about. Beneath each picture, I read a charming German verse. All these details have been stored up in my memory until now, things like

the pot of balsam, and the bed with its festive sheets, and other objects that surrounded me at that moment. I see, as if I were looking at him right now, my host himself, a man of fifty years, fresh and full of life, with his long green frock coat sporting three medals on its faded ribbon.

I had not even had a chance to settle with my driver, when Dunya returned with the samovar. Before she had even looked at me twice, the little coquette could tell the effect she had on me; she lowered her big, sky blue eyes; I began talking with her, she answered me without any shyness, like a young woman who had seen the world. I offered her father a mug of grog; Duneya I gave a cup of tea, and the three of us started talking, as if we had known one another our whole lives.

The horses had been ready for some time, but I didn't want to say goodbye to the stationmaster and his daughter just yet. Finally, I begged their leave; the father wished me a good trip, and the daughter saw me to my carriage. I lingered on the porch, and asked her to let me kiss her; Duneya agreed. I have received many kisses "*since I took up the trade*" but not one of them has left me such a precious, beautiful memory.

Years passed, and circumstance brought me to that same highway, to the very places I had been before. I recalled the daughter of the old stationmaster and cheered at the thought that I would see her again. But maybe, I thought, the old stationmaster has been replaced by this time; probably Duneya was married. The thought that one or the other of them had died flashed into my brain, and I approached the *** station with a sad foreboding.

The horses stopped beside the little mail house. Entering it, I recognized the paintings depicting the prodigal son; the table and the bed stood in the same places as before; but there were no flowers on the windowsill, and the general impression that everything gave off was one of decay and neglect. The stationmaster was sleeping under a sheepskin coat; my arrival woke him, and he stood. It was indeed Samson Virin; but how he had aged! While he gathered himself together to copy out my order for fresh horses, I watched his face, which was unshaven, thick with grey hair and deeply wrinkled, and his hunched-over spine. I could not stop marveling, that three or four years could transform a man full of life into a sickly old geezer. "Do you recognize me?" I asked him. "I'm an old acquaintance of yours." "Could be," he said sullenly. "The road through here is wide. Many travelers come through." "Is your Duneya well?" I continued. The old man frowned. "God only knows," he answered. "I suppose she's married?" I said. The old man pretended that he had not heard my question, and continued reading out my request for horses in a whisper. I stopped my interrogation and asked for some tea to be put on. Curiosity had begun to get the better of me, and I hoped that grog might loosen my old friend's tongue.

I was right: the old man did not refuse the mug I offered. The rum, I noticed, cheered him up. By the second mug he had become talkative:

he remembered me, or made it look like he remembered me, and so I heard the tale that has so strongly touched and occupied my thoughts since that time.

“So, you knew my Duneya,” he began. “Who didn’t know her? Ach! Duneya, Duneya! What a girl she was! Everyone who came through praised her, no one had a bad word to say. Barins gave her things, here a dress, there an earring. Men who were just passing by stopped on purpose, pretending they wanted to have lunch, or some supper, but really only to keep on looking at her. Always, Barin, the ones who got mad at me would grow quiet in front of her, and then start speaking kindly to me. Believe me, sir, couriers talked with her for a full half hour. She kept the house: cleaning, cooking, she could do it all. And me, an old fool, I couldn’t look on her and not be glad; how could I not love my Duneya, how could I not cherish my child? And could she truly be dead? Well, there’s no escaping misfortune; what’s been decided, can’t be avoided.”

Now he started to tell me the details of his misfortune. Three years ago, on a wintery night, when the stationmaster was ruling a new book and his daughter sewing a dress for herself behind the partition, a troika drove up, and a traveler in a Circissan cap, wearing a soldier’s overcoat and wrapped in a shawl, entered the room and began demanding horses. The horses had all been given out. Upon being told this the traveler raised his voice and brandished his whip; but Duneya, who was accustomed to this sort of scene, ran out from behind the partition and affectionately turned to him with a question: would he like something to eat? Duneya’s appearance did what it usually did. The traveler’s anger left him; he agreed to wait for the horses and order himself some dinner. Having taken off his wet, shaggy hat, unwound his shawl, and pulled off his overcoat, he revealed himself to be a young, good-looking hussar with a little black moustache. He made himself at home in the stationmaster’s quarters, and began talking cheerfully with him and his daughter. Dinner was served. Meanwhile, the horses arrived, and the stationmaster ordered that they be harnessed to the traveler’s carriage immediately, without being fed; upon his return however he found the young man lying practically unconscious on the bench; he was feeling bad, his head had started to hurt, it would be impossible to keep traveling ... What could he do? The stationmaster let him have his bed, and it was decided that, if the sick man did not improve, they would send to C*** for a doctor the following morning.

The next day the hussar was worse. His manservant rode into town to get a doctor. Duneya tied a kerchief moistened with vinegar around his head, and sat with her sewing by his bed. Around the stationmaster the sick man sighed and was for the most part quiet, though he did drink two cups of coffee and, sighing, ordered himself some lunch. Duneya did not leave his side. He kept asking for something to drink, and Duneya brought him a jug of her special lemonade. The sick man moistened his lips and returned the jug, squeezing Duneya’s fingers

with his own weak hand every time, as a sign of thanks. The doctor arrived in time for lunch. He felt the patient's pulse, spoke with him in German, and explained, in Russian, that he needed only quiet, and that in two days it would be possible for him to get on the road again. The hussar gave him twenty-five rubles for the visit and invited him to eat lunch with them; the doctor agreed; they ate with great appetite, drank a bottle of wine and parted on very good terms with one another.

By the next day the hussar had completely recovered. He was extremely cheerful, joked continually with both Duneya and the stationmaster. He whistled a song, talked with travelers, and wrote their horse-orders out in the postal book, and the good stationmaster was so pleased by all this that on the third morning he was sorry to part with his beloved houseguest. It was Sunday. Duneya was preparing herself for mass. The hussar's carriage was brought to him. He thanked the stationmaster, tipped him generously for his hospitality and entertainment. He said goodbye to Duneya and offered to take her to the church, which was located on the edge of the village. Duneya hesitated ... "What are you afraid of?" her father said. "His Excellency is not a wolf, he won't eat you. Ride with him to the church." Duneya sat in the carriage beside the hussar, the servant jumped up on his box, the driver whistled, and the horses galloped off.

The poor stationmaster did not understand how he could have allowed his Duneya to travel with the hussar, why he had been so blind, or what he had been thinking at the time. Not a half hour had passed when his heart began to ache, ache, and worry overcame him to such a degree that he couldn't stand it anymore, and went to the Mass himself. As he approached the church, he saw that the parishioners had already dispersed, though Duneya herself was neither in the courtyard nor on the church porch. He entered the church hurriedly; the priest was stepping down from the pulpit, the psalm reader was extinguishing candles, two old men were still praying in a corner; but there was no Duneya in the church. The poor father could barely bring himself to ask the psalm reader whether or not she had been at Mass. The reader answered that she had not. The stationmaster returned home neither dead nor alive. He had only one hope left: Duneya, in the flightiness of her youth, had decided, maybe, to continue riding to the next station, where her god-mother lived. He waited in torturous agitation for the return of the troika he had last seen her in. The driver did not return until, later that night, he arrived drunk and alone, with the fatal news: "Duneya went on further past that station with the hussar."

The old man could not bear his unhappiness; he collapsed immediately onto that very bed where, the night before, the young deceiver had lain. Going back over everything that had happened, the stationmaster could guess, now, that the sickness had been feigned. The poor man fell ill with a strong fever; he was sent to S*** and another man took up his duties for a little while. The very same doctor

who had come for the hussar treated him as well. He revealed to the stationmaster that the young man had been completely healthy; that he had furthermore guessed his bad intentions at the time but had remained silent, fearing his whip. Whether the German was telling the truth, or whether he only wanted to brag about his foresight, his words did not really comfort the poor patient. He had barely recovered from his illness, when the stationmaster requested two weeks' leave from the postmaster at S*** and, without saying a word about his intentions, set off on foot to find his daughter. The horse order revealed that Captain Minsky had been traveling from Smolensk to Petersburg. The carriage driver who had taken him said that Duneya had cried the whole way, though it did seem that she had traveled willingly. "Maybe," the stationmaster thought, "I will lead my little lamb back home." He arrived in Petersburg with this intention; rented a room in the Izmailov Regimental district from a retired noncommissioned officer, and began his search. He soon learned that Captain Minsky lived in Petersburg, in the Demuth Hotel. The stationmaster decided to show himself.

Early next morning he went to the Captain's anteroom and asked that it be announced to his Excellency that an old soldier wished to see him. The orderly, who was cleaning a boot on a boot tree, explained that the Barin was still sleeping, and that he never received anyone before eleven o'clock. The stationmaster left and returned again at the designated time. Minsky himself entered in a dressing gown and red skull cap. "Well, my friend, what can I do for you?" he asked. The old man's heart grew agitated, tears welled in his eyes, and in a trembling voice he managed to stutter only "Your Excellency! ... As a Christian, I beg of you! ..." Minsky looked at him quickly, blushed, led him by the hand into his office and locked the door behind him. "Your Excellency," the old man continued, "What falls off the cart is lost. But at least give me back my poor Duneya. So you enjoyed yourself with her; don't ruin her for no reason." "What's done is done," said the young man, who was extremely embarrassed. "I'm guilty before you, and happy to ask your forgiveness, but don't think that I can give up Duneya. She will be happy, I give you my word of honor. What use is she to you? She loves me; she has outgrown her former life. Neither of you will ever forget what happened." After saying this, Minsky thrust something into the stationmaster's hand, opened the door, and the old man found himself, somehow, out on the street again.

He stood there motionless for a while, until finally he noticed a bundle of paper protruding from his shirt cuff; he pulled it out and unrolled a bunch of crumpled five and ten ruble notes. Tears welled up in his eyes again, tears of indignation! He squeezed the bills in his fist, threw them to the ground, ground them under his heel and walked off. After going a few steps he stopped, thought better about it ... and turned ... but the bills were already gone. Seeing him turning, a well-dressed young man ran to his cab, quickly took his seat and cried: "Go!" The stationmaster did not pursue him. He decided to go home,

but before he did so he wanted to see his poor Duneya, if only once more. He returned to Minsky's two days later hoping to accomplish this; but the orderly told him sternly that the Barin was not receiving anyone, butted him from the anteroom with a push of his chest, and slammed the door behind him. The stationmaster waited, waited—and then left.

The stationmaster went that very night to Liteyin street to attend the church service of Our Lady of the Sorrows. Suddenly a dandified droshky tore past him: the stationmaster recognized it as Minsky's. The droshky pulled right up to the front of a three story house, and the hussar ran in the front entrance. A thought flashed into the stationmaster's head. He turned and approached the coachman. "Say, friend, whose horse is this?" he asked. "It's not Minsky's is it?" "It is," the coachman answered. "And what's it to you?" "Well, nothing, except that your Barin ordered me to deliver a note to his Duneya, but here I've gone and forgotten where this Duneya lives." "Here, on the second floor. You're late with your note, friend; he's with her himself right now." "No need then, replied the stationmaster, as his heart leapt. "Thanks for the help, I'll do my job now." And with these words he ran up the front steps.

The doors were locked; he rang, a few seconds of painful expectation passed. A key rumbled, the doors opened. "Is Avodya Samsona staying here?" he asked. "She is," answered the young maid. "What do you want with her?" The stationmaster entered the hall without answering. "You can't! You can't!" the servant called after him, "Avodya Samsona has guests." But the unhearing stationmaster kept walking. The first two rooms were dark, in the third there was a fire. He walked up to the open doors, and paused. In the room, which was beautifully decorated, Minsky sat thinking. Duneya, dressed all in the latest fashion, sat on the arm of his armchair, like a horsewoman on her English saddle. She was looking at Minsky tenderly as she wound her dark curls around ring-studded fingers. The poor stationmaster! Never had his daughter seemed so lovely to him; he couldn't help but admire her. "Who's there?" she asked without looking up. He kept completely silent. Not having gotten an answer, Duneya raised her head ... and fell with a cry on the carpet. The terrified Minsky rushed to support her, but when he saw, suddenly, the old stationmaster at the door he left Duneya and walked towards him, shaking with rage. "What do you want?" he said, clenching his teeth. "To take everything from me, like a thief? Or do you want to kill me? Go away!" And, grabbing the old man's collar with a strong hand, he pushed him down the stairs.

The old man returned to his room. His friend the noncommissioned officer suggested that he lodge a complaint; the stationmaster thought it over, threw up his hands, and decided to quit.

After two days he set off from Petersburg for his station, where he took up his duties again. "I've lived without Duneya for three years

now," he concluded, "And I've heard nothing about her, not a word. God only knows whether she's alive or not. So it goes. She is not the first, and she won't be the last who's been enticed by a passing scamp, kept for a while and then, yes, thrown away. There are many like that in Petersburg, young fools, dressed in satin and velvet today, and tomorrow, just watch, sweeping the streets with their skirts, along with the rest of the poor trash. When you think that it could be true, that Duneya may be lost, it makes you want to sin in your heart and wish her in her grave out of pity."

That was the story of my friend the old stationmaster, a story interrupted more than once by tears, which he wiped away touchingly with his coat-flap, like the zealous Terentich in the beautiful ballad by Dimitriev. His crying was partly excited by the punch, five cups of which he had emptied as he spoke; but how could I not be deeply touched by them? For a long time after leaving, I could not forget the old stationmaster's story, I thought and thought about the poor Duneya.

Recently, while passing through the village of ***, I had occasion to recall my friend; I learned that the station over which he had held jurisdiction had been closed. To my question: "Is the old stationmaster alive?" no one had a satisfactory answer. So I resolved to visit the place I knew so well. I took some private horses, and set off for the village of N.

This happened in the fall. Gray clouds covered the sky; a cold wind was blowing off the cropped fields, carrying the red and yellow leaves from whatever trees it met. I arrived in the village at sunset and stopped at the station. On the porch (where Duneya had once kissed me) a fat old lady emerged and answered my questions by telling me that the stationmaster had been dead a year, that a brewmaster had settled in his house, and that she herself was the brewer's wife. I began to regret the wasted journey and the rubles I'd spent on gifts. "What did he die of?" I asked the brewmaster's wife. "Drink, sir," she answered. "And where did they bury him?" "On the outskirts, next to his late wife." "Would it be possible for someone to show me the grave?" "Why not? Hey, Vanka! Stop fooling around with the cat. Take the Barin to the cemetery and show him the stationmaster's grave."

At these words a ragged little boy, red haired and with one eye, ran up and then led me directly to the village outskirts.

"Did you know the deceased?" I asked him on the road.

"Know him? He taught me to carve reeds into flutes. Sometimes (God rest his soul!) when he left the tavern, we'd say to him: 'Grandfather, grandfather! Nuts!,' and he'd share his nuts with us. He did things like this for us all the time."

"And do any of the travelers passing through remember him?"

"There aren't many travelers now. The assessor drops by, but he isn't concerned about the dead. Last year a rich lady came through asking about the stationmaster, and went to see his grave."

"What kind of lady?" I asked curiously.

“A beautiful lady,” the boy answered. “She was traveling in a carriage with six horses, along with three little ones and a nurse, and a black pug dog; and when they told her that the old stationmaster was dead she began crying and told the children, “Sit still, I’m going to the cemetery.” And I asked to take her. The lady said, “I know the way,” and gave me five silver coins—such a good lady!

We went to the cemetery, a bare place, unsheltered, dotted with wooden crosses, without a single tree to give its shade. Never in my life had I seen such a graveyard.

“Here’s the grave of the old stationmaster,” the boy told me, jumping onto a pile of sand in which a black cross with a gold design on it had been planted.

“And the lady came here?” I asked.

“She came,” Vanka answered. “I watched her from a distance. She lay down here, lay for a long time. And then the lady went to the village and saw the priest, and she gave him money and left, and gave me five silver coins—blessed lady!

I gave the boy a five-ruble piece too, no longer regretting my journey, or the money I’d spent.

† Instead of the more familiar “baron” [which denotes a rank in the hierarchy of nobility], “barin,” transliterated directly from the Russian, **барин**, describes a person who owns, rather than rents, land. [Trans.]

LADY-MAID

You, Dushenka, are well dressed in every respect

—BOGDANOVICH

Ivan Petrovich Berestov's estate was located in one of our remote provinces. He served in the guards as a youth, retired at the beginning of 1797, left for his estate, and from that point on did not go anywhere else. He married a poor noblewoman, who died in childbirth while he was out hunting. The responsibilities of a landowner soon consoled him. He built his house from his own design, established his own cloth factory, trebled his income and began to consider himself the smartest man in the neighborhood, which assertion his neighbors did not contradict when they paid him a visit with their families and dogs. On weekdays he went around in a velveteen jacket, on holidays he put on a frock coat cut from the house cloth; he recorded his expenses himself and read nothing, except the *Senate Gazette*. Most people liked him, though they considered him proud. One person who did not get along with him was Gregory Ivanovich Muromsky, his nearest neighbor. Here was a true Russian barin. Having squandered the majority of his inheritance in Moscow, and being a recent widower, he had retired to his last remaining village, where he continued with his exploits, though in a new way. He planted an English garden, on which he spent almost all of his remaining money. His stable boys dressed like English jockeys. His daughter had an English governess. He cultivated his fields using the English method—*"But no foreign manner will bear Russian bread,"* and so, despite a notable reduction of expenses, Gregory Ivanovich's income did not increase; even in the country, he found new ways of getting into debt. But despite all this he was not thought of as a stupid person, for he was the first person in his province to get a mortgage on his estate from the Tutorial Council, an operation that was considered to be very complex and daring at the time. Of all the people who judged him harshly, Berestov spoke the loudest. He had, by nature, a distinct hatred of innovation. He was unable to speak coolly about his neighbor's Anglomania, and found constant opportunity to criticize him. If, while showing guests around his property, someone praised his management methods he would say with a smile "Yes sir! We don't do it like my neighbor Gregory Ivanovich. He may want to ruin himself in the English way, but we'd rather keep ourselves satisfied like Russians." Zealous neighbors brought this joke to Gregory Ivanovich's attention, and others like it, along with additions and explanations. The Anglophile bore the criticism the same way our journalists do. He flew into a rage and called his slanderer a bear and provincial.

This was the relationship between the two landowners when Berestov's son came to visit him in the country. He had been educated at *** University and intended to enlist in military service, but his father thought this was a bad idea. The young man considered himself utterly unfit for bureaucratic work. Neither yielded to the other; in the meantime young Alexi came back home to live as a Barin, though he resolved to grow his moustache out just in case.

Alexi was a fine fellow, all things considered. Truly, it would have been a pity if his good-looking figure had never been fit into a soldier's uniform; if, instead of posing on horseback, he had spent his youth bent over office papers. When they saw how he always rode first on the hunt, without paying the least attention to the trail, the neighbors all agreed that he would never make a good head clerk. The ladies eyed him, and some even lost their heads; but Alexi paid them little attention, and they attributed this diffidence to an already-established romantic connection. They even passed from hand to hand an address line that had been copied off a letter he had mailed: "For Akulin Petrovna Kurochkinoi, in Moscow, across from the Alexy Monastery, at the house of Savalyeva the coppersmith. I humbly ask you to pass on this letter from A.N.R."

Those of my readers who have never lived in the country cannot possibly imagine the charm of those provincial ladies! Raised in the fresh air, in the shade of their apple orchards, they learn about the world from books. From an early age, solitude, freedom, and reading develop passions in them that our dissipated beauties don't know. For these ladies, the sound of a bell ringing is an adventure, a journey to a neighboring city is considered an epic in their life, and a visit from guests leave deep, sometimes lifelong memories. Of course, one is free to smile at their many oddities, but a superficial observer's jokes cannot detract from their essential virtues, the most important of which is *particularity of character, individualité*, without which, as Jean-Paul says, human greatness cannot exist. Women in the capitol receive, perhaps, a better education; but experience of the world smoothes out their characters and causes their spirits to become as similar as their hats. This is said not in blame or judgment, nevertheless "*nota nostra manet*," as one old commentator writes.[†]

It is easy to imagine the kind of impression Alexy must have produced on our circle of ladies. He was the first man to present himself to them as dark and disillusioned, and he spoke to them about a loss of joy and withered youth; moreover he wore a black ring with a skull on it. All this was wonderfully new in the district. The ladies lost their heads over him.

But the person who was most obsessed with him was the daughter of my Anglophile, Liza (or Betsy, as Gregory Ivanovich usually called her). The fathers did not call on one another, she had still not seen Alexy; meanwhile all the young neighbors talked only about him. She was seventeen years old. Black eyes lit up her pleasant, dark-complexioned face. She was an only, and therefore spoiled, child. Her

playfulness and constant pranks delighted her father and drove her governess Miss Jackson (a prim, forty-year-old woman who powdered her face and blackened her eyebrows, reread *Pamela* twice a year, received two thousand rubles for all this, and was dying of boredom “in this barbarous Russia”) to despair.

Nastya was Liza’s maid; she was older, but just as flighty as her lady. Liza loved her very much, told her all her secrets, plotted with her—in other words, Nastya was a better known face in Priluchino village than a panderer in a French tragedy.

“Let me go out today,” Nastya said one day while dressing her lady.

“Go ahead: where to?”

“To Tugulo, to the Berestovs. It’s the cook’s wife’s name day and yesterday she came to invite us to eat with her.”

“Well!” said Liza. “The masters quarrel and the servants entertain one another.”

“And what do we care about the masters?” retorted Nastya. “Besides, I’m yours, not your papa’s. You’re not quarreling with the young Berestov—yet. Let the old men fight if they like.”

“Nastya, see if you can get a look at Alexy Berestov and tell me what he’s like, and whether or not he’s good looking.”

Nastya agreed, and Liza waited impatiently for her return all day. That night, she appeared.

“Well Lizaveta Grigoryevna,” she said as she entered the room, “I saw the young Berestov: actually I saw quite enough of him. I was in his company all day.”

“How is that possible? Tell me everything, from the beginning.”

“Alright, alright. So we went, me, Anis Yegorovna, Nevila, Dunka ...”

“Fine, I know all that. But what happened after that?”

“Hold on, I’m telling it from the beginning. So we went to this dinner. The house was full of folk. The Kolobins were there. The Zaharas, the steward’s wife with her daughter, the Hlupinskys ...”

“Alright already! And Berestov?”

“Just a minute. There we were sitting at the table, the steward’s wife at the head of the table, me next to her ... and the daughter, who was sulking, as if I cared a whiff what she thought ...”

“Nastya, aaah! How boring you are with your eternal details!”

“Yes, well, how impatient you are! So after that we got up from the table ... we’d been sitting there for three hours, and the dinner was very good; sweet blue blanc-mange, with red stripes ... Anyway, then we got up from the table and went to the garden to play tag, and that’s when the young Barin showed up.”

“And? Is it true that he’s very good looking?”

“Very true, a stunner, you could say. Well-built, tall, red cheeked.”

“Really? I thought he had a pale face. What else? What kind of person did you think he was? Melancholy, thoughtful?”

“Not at all. I haven’t seen such high spirits. He decided to play tag with us.”

“He played tag with you! Impossible!”

“Quite possible! And that wasn’t his last trick. When he caught us, he kissed us!”

“Willful Nastya, you lie!”

“Willful yourself, I don’t. It wasn’t easy keeping away from him. He spent all day messing around with us.”

“So why do they say he’s in love and won’t look at anyone else?”

“I don’t know, but he looked at me plenty, and at Tanya, the stewardess’s daughter, too; also at Pasha, the Kolbinsky girl, yes, I hate to say it but he pretty much looked at everyone, the rogue!”

“Incredible! And what do they say about him in the house?”

“The Barin, they say, is wonderful: so good, so happy. Only one thing: he’s too much of a woman chaser. But this doesn’t seem so bad to me: he’ll settle down in time.”

“How I’d like to see him!” Liza said with a sigh.

“Well, what’s stopping you? Tugilov isn’t far from us, three verst at most. Walk there, or ride, you’ll probably meet him. Every day, early in the morning, he takes his gun and goes hunting.”

“No, that’s no good. He might think I’m chasing him. So long as our fathers are fighting, I’ll never be able to get to know him ... Oh Nastya! I’ve got it! I’ll dress up like a peasant girl!”

“Of course: wear a large shirt and sarafan, yes, and walk boldly to Tugilov; there’s no way Berestov will pass you by.”

“And I can speak dialect so wonderfully. Oh Nastya, dear Nastya! What a great idea!” And Liza went to bed with the intention of carrying out her happy plan no matter what.

She began the very next day; she sent to the bazaar for loose linen, a blue nankeen and small yellow buttons, cut herself a shirt and sarafan with Nastya’s help, set her maids to work on the sewing, and by night everything was ready. Liza tried on her new outfit in front of a mirror, and had to admit that she had never seemed so lovely. She rehearsed her role, bowing low and then shaking her head back and forth a few times, like the head on a porcelain cat figurine; she spoke in peasant dialect and covered her mouth when she laughed, all of which earned Nastya’s approval. Only one thing was hard for her: she tried to walk around the courtyard barefooted, but the turf pricked her tender feet and the sand and pebbles proved unbearable. Nastya helped her with this: she measured Liza’s feet, ran across the field to Trofim the shepherd and ordered him to make a pair of bast shoes to her specifications. The next day Liza was up before the sun had risen or the sky grown light. The whole house was asleep. Nastya waited for the shepherd by the gate. The horn sounded, and the village flock began making its way past the master’s lawn. Trofim gave Nastya a pair of small, gaily-painted bast shoes as he walked past her, receiving for his troubles a half-ruble reward. Liza quietly put on her peasant clothes, told Nastya in a whisper what to do about Miss Jackson, went out the back entrance and, after making her way through the kitchen garden, ran into the fields.

Dawn was shining in the east, and the rows of golden clouds seemed to be waiting for the sun the way a courtier might wait for his sovereign; the clear sky, the freshness of the morning, the dew, the light breeze and the little birds that were singing all filled Liza's heart with youthful joy: she seemed not to walk, but to fly, so afraid was she of meeting someone who might recognize her. As she approached the grove at the edge of her father's property, Liza slowed down. This was where she was supposed to wait for Alexy. She had no idea why her heart was beating so quickly; but then, the fear that accompanies our young adventures is what makes them so attractive. Liza entered the darkness of the grove. Its dull, rolling sound greeted the young girl. Her joy grew more subdued. Little by little she gave herself over to a sweet dreaminess. She was thinking about ... but is it possible to say accurately what a seventeen-year-old Barinya is thinking, in a grove, at six o'clock on a spring morning? So she was walking, lost in thought, along the path, shadowed on both sides by the tall trees, when suddenly a beautiful pointer dog began barking at her. Liza grew frightened and cried out. At that moment, someone spoke: "*Tout beau, Shogar, ici.*" A young hunter appeared from behind the bushes. "Don't be afraid, my dear," he said to Liza, "My dog won't eat you." She had already managed to shake off her fear, and saw how to take advantage of the situation. "Oh yes, sir," she said, pretending partial shyness. "But I'm scared. See how mean she is; she's throwing herself at me again." Meanwhile, Alexy (the reader has by this point figured out his identity) kept looking at the young peasant girl. "I'll come with you, if you're afraid," he told her, "Will you let me walk beside you?" "Who's stopping you? The road's for everyone, follow it where you like." "Where do you come from?" "From Priluchino; I'm Vasily the blacksmith's daughter. I'm hunting mushrooms." (Liza had taken a small basket on a cord with her.) "And you, Barin? Tugilov, right?" "Exactly right," answered Alexy. "I'm the young Barin's valet." Alexy wanted their relationship to be on an equal footing. But Liza smiled as she looked at him. "You're lying," she said. "I'm no fool. You're the Barin yourself, I can see it." "What makes you think that?" "Everything, pretty much." "Like what?" "As if I could mistake a Barin for a servant. Your clothes are wrong, you speak different, you don't call your dog the way we do." Liza liked Alexy more and more every minute. Being unused to standing on ceremony with village girls, he made a move to embrace her; but Liza jumped out of his way and suddenly assumed such a strict and cold look that Alexy, though amused, restrained himself from further attempts. "If you want to be friends," she said significantly, "You'd better not forget yourself from now on." "Who taught you to be so wise?" Alexy asked, roaring with laughter. "Could it be little Nastya, my friend, and your lady's maid? What a way to spread enlightenment!" Liza, who felt that she was straying from her role, corrected herself. "You really think I've never been in the master's house?" she asked. "Don't worry: I've seen and heard everything. But," she continued, "Chattering with you has kept

me from gathering any mushrooms. So you go your way, Barin, and I'll go mine. God bless." Liza tried to leave, but Alexy grabbed her hand. "What's your name, my love?" "Akulina," Liza answered, as she tried to free her hand from Alexy's grip. "Let me go, Barin, it's time for me to go home." "Well Akulina, my darling, I'm certainly going to pay a visit to your dear father, the blacksmith Vasily." "What are you talking about?" Liza replied vehemently. "For God's sake, don't come. If the house finds out that I was jabbering with the Barin alone in the grove it will mean bad luck for me: my father Vasily the blacksmith will beat me to death." "But I must see you again, no matter what." "Well, sometime I'll come here again for mushrooms." "When?" "Tomorrow, probably." "Dear Akulina, I want to cover you with kisses, but I don't dare. Tomorrow, then, at this time, is that right?" "Yes, yes." "You won't trick me?" "I won't trick you." "Swear." "By Holy Friday, I'll come."

The young lovers parted. Liza left the forest, crossed the field, stole into the garden and ran straight to the farmhouse, where Nastya was waiting for her. Once there, she changed clothes, answering her impatient confidante's questions distractedly, and then showed herself in the parlor. The table was set, breakfast was ready, and Miss Jackson, who had powdered her face already and corseted herself into the shape of a wine glass, cut a small slice of bread and butter. Liza's father praised her for her early morning walk "There is nothing healthier," he said, "Than waking with the dawn." Next he brought out some examples of human longevity, which he had drawn from English journals, remarking that all people who lived past the age of one hundred abstained from drinking vodka and rose at dawn both winter and summer. Liza was not listening. In her mind she was mentally replaying all the events of the morning's meeting, the whole conversation between Akulina and the young hunter, and her conscience began to bother her. She kept trying to tell herself that her conversation had not crossed the boundary of decency, that the joke wouldn't go anywhere. But her conscience was grumbling louder than her reason. The promise she had given about tomorrow worried her more than anything: she was close to deciding not to keep the oath she'd given so solemnly. But if Alexy waited for her in vain, he might go to the village to seek out the daughter of Vasily the blacksmith, the real Akulina, a chubby, pimply girl, and so guess her reckless prank. The idea of this horrified Liza, and she decided to show herself again the next morning as Akulina.

As for Alexy, he was delighted. He thought about his new acquaintance all day; at night the image of the dark beauty followed him through his dreams. Dawn had barely broken by the time he had dressed. He went out into the field without taking time to load his gun, accompanied by his faithful Shogar, and ran to the promised meeting place. He waited in excruciating expectation for about half an hour; finally he saw a blue sarafan flash between the bushes and rushed forward to meet the dear Akulina. When she saw his gratitude

she smiled in delight; but Alexy noticed that there were now traces of sadness and worry on her face. He wanted to know why. Liza confessed that what she was doing seemed silly to her, that she repented of it, that she hadn't wanted to break the promise she'd given, but that this time really would be the last and that she wished he would break off his acquaintance with her, of which nothing good could come. Naturally, all this was said in dialect; but the ideas and feeling, unusual for a simple peasant girl, astonished Alexy. He used all his fancy eloquence in order to dissuade Akulina of her resolve, he had assured her of the innocence of his intentions, promised never to give her cause for repentance, to obey her in everything, had begged her not to deprive him of his sole joy: to see her alone, every day if possible, or at least twice a week. He spoke the language of sincere passion, and in that moment was truly in love. Liza heard him out silently. "Give me your word," she said finally, "That you will never try to find me in the village or ask about me. Give me your word not to try to meet me except when I say you can." Alexy was swearing to her on her Holy Friday, but she stopped him with a smile. "You don't need to swear," Liza said. "Your promise is enough to satisfy me." After this they talked together in a friendly way, walking together through the forest, until Liza said: it's time. They parted, and Alexy, who had been left by himself, could not understand how a simple village girl had managed in two meetings to gain such a sincere influence over him. His interactions with Akulina had the charm of novelty, and though the strange peasant girl's rules were tiresome to him, the idea of not keeping his word never even entered his mind. The truth was that Alexy, despite the fateful ring, the secret correspondence, and the gloomy disillusion, was a good and earnest young man, with a true heart that was capable of delighting in innocent things.

If I had my way, I would certainly describe the young people's meetings in every detail, their growing love of one another, their activities, conversations; but I know that the majority of my readers wouldn't enjoy this as much as I would. Details like these usually seem tedious; therefore I'll skip over them by saying only that not even two weeks had passed when already my Alexy was head over heels in love, and Liza no less inclined, though she was quieter about it than he was. Both of them were happy in the present, and thought little about the future.

The thought of forming a stronger bond often passed through their minds, but they never talked about it to one another. The reason for this is clear: no matter how attached he was to his dear Akulina, Alexy understood completely the distance that existed between himself and the poor peasant girl. Liza knew how much their fathers hated one another, and did not dare to hope for a mutual reconciliation. Moreover, her pride was secretly aroused by the dark, romantic hope of finally seeing the Tugilovsky landowner at the feet of a Prulichinsky blacksmith's daughter. All of a sudden an important event occurred

that almost changed the nature of their relationship.

One bright, cold morning (the kind that our Russian autumn abounds in) Ivan Petrovich Berestov went out for a ride; he took a pair of greyhounds with him just in case, as well as a groom and some village boys with rattles. At the same time Gregory Ivanich Muromsky, tempted by the beautiful weather, ordered his young bobtailed mare and proceeded to trot around his Anglified grounds. As he rode up to the woods he caught sight of his neighbor seated proudly on horseback, in a short overcoat with a fox fur lining, lying in wait for the rabbits that the boys were driving out of the bushes with cries and rattles. If Gregory Ivanich had known about this meeting ahead of time, he would of course have turned around; but he came upon Berestov unexpectedly and found himself suddenly a pistol's shot away from him. There was nothing he could do. Muromsky rode up to his rival like a cultured European and greeted him courteously. Berestov answered with the same cordiality a chained bear might show when bowing, under his trainer's orders, to an audience. Just then a rabbit jumped out of the forest and ran onto the field. Berestov and his groom cried at the top of their voices, released the dogs, and galloped off in pursuit at top speed. Muromsky's horse, which had never been on a hunt, took fright and bolted. Muromsky, who described himself as an excellent horseman, gave her rein, inwardly pleased with the turn of events that had saved him from his awful companion. But the horse, which had been galloping towards the ravine without noticing it, suddenly threw itself on its side, and Muromsky could not hold on. After falling rather hard on the frozen ground he lay there, cursing his bobtailed mare, which had stopped as soon as she realized she was riderless. Ivan Petrovich rode up to him, inquiring whether he had hurt himself. Meanwhile, the groom caught hold of the guilty horse by grabbing her by the bridle. He helped Muromsky get back into the saddle, and Berestov invited him to his house. Muromsky could not refuse, for he felt himself indebted, and in this way Berestov returned in glory, having hunted down both a rabbit and his rival, who was wounded and taken practically as a prisoner of war.

At breakfast, the neighbors talked together amicably. Muromsky asked to borrow a droshky from Berestova, for he had to confess that, due to his injury, he was in no shape to travel home on horseback. Berestov accompanied him all the way to the front porch, and Muromsky did not leave before he had extracted his neighbor's word of honor that he would come the next day (with Alexy Ivanovich) to have supper at Priluchno, as his distinguished guests. So it appeared that the ancient and deep-rooted feud was coming to an end, thanks to the shyness of a bobtailed mare.

Liza ran out to meet Gregory Ivanich. "What's this, Papa?" she said with surprise. "Why are you limping? Where is your horse? Whose droshky is that?" "You'll never guess, my dear," Gregory Ivanovich answered, and he told her everything that had happened. Liza didn't believe her ears. Without giving her time to collect herself, Gregory

Ivanich explained that tomorrow they were having supper with the Berestovs. "What are you saying?" she said, growing pale. "Berestovs, father and son! Supper—tomorrow! No, papa, please excuse me: I will not be able to attend." "Have you lost your mind?" her father responded. "Have you grown shy, or have you cultivated an inherited hatred towards them, like the heroine of some romantic tale? Come now, that's enough." "No papa, not for anything in the world, not for any treasure will I appear before the Berestovs!" Gregory Ivanich shrugged his shoulders and did not argue with her any more, for he knew how useless it was to contradict her. He went to lie down after his memorable adventure.

Lizaveta Grigoryevna went to her room and called Nastya. They discussed the following day's visit for a long time. What would Alexy think if he recognized his Akulina in the well-bred Barishnya? What would he think of her behavior and principles, of her sense? On the other hand, Liza wanted very much to see what kind of impression an unexpected meeting like that would make on him. Suddenly, she had an idea. She immediately told it to Nastya; they rejoiced, decided it was god-sent, and resolved to carry it out without fail.

At breakfast the next morning Gregory Ivanich asked his daughter whether or not she still intended to hide herself from the Berestovs. "Papa," Liza answered, "I will receive them, if you wish, but on one condition: no matter how I appear before them, you will not scold me or give any sign of surprise or dissatisfaction." "Once again, a prank of some kind!" Gregory Ivanich said, smiling. "But alright, alright; I agree, go ahead, do what you wish, my dark eyes." With this, he kissed her on the forehead, and Liza ran off to get ready.

At exactly two o'clock a Russian-made carriage, harnessed with six horses, entered the courtyard and rolled its way around the dark green circle of turf. Old Berestov climbed the front steps with the help of two liverymen. His son arrived after him on horseback and then went with him into the dining room, where the table had already been set. Muromsky's reception of his neighbors could not have been more gracious; he invited them to take a look at the garden and menagerie before supper, leading them along paths that had been carefully swept and strewn with sand. Old Berestov was secretly dismayed at seeing so much labor wasted on useless caprice, but he held his tongue out of politeness. His son shared neither the disapproval of the frugal landowner, nor the delight of the self-satisfied Anglomaniac; he was waiting impatiently for the daughter of the house, about whom he had heard so much, to appear, for though his heart, as we know, was already occupied, young beauties were always able to make claims on his imagination.

Upon returning to the drawing room, the three took their seats: the old men talked about the old times and told anecdotes of their service, while Alexy pondered what role he would assume in Liza's presence. He decided that cold absent-mindedness was, in the end, the best way to proceed, and prepared himself accordingly. The door opened; he

turned his head with such indifference, such proud carelessness, that the heart of the most inveterate coquette would have shuddered without fail. Unfortunately, instead of Liza old Miss Jackson came in, powdered, corseted, with lowered eyes and a little dropped curtsey, and Alexy's beautiful maneuvers were wasted. He had not had time to gather his strength when the door opened once more, and Liza entered. Everyone stood; her father began presenting the guests, but stopped suddenly and hurriedly bit his lips. Liza, his dark-complexioned Liza, was powdered to her ears, her eyebrows outlined even more than Miss Jackson's; false locks, of a much lighter color than her normal hair, flounced off her head like a Louis XIV wig; sleeves "*a l'imbicile*" protruded as dramatically as the hoop skirt of Madame de Pompadour; her waist was corseted into a tight "X", and all of her mother's diamonds that had not yet been pawned at the pawnshop sparkled on her fingers, neck, and ears. Alexy was unable to recognize his Akulina in the glitter of this funny-looking lady. His father took her hand to kiss, and he followed him reluctantly; when he touched her white little fingers it seemed to him that she was trembling. Meanwhile he had managed to catch sight of her tiny foot, which she had both shod and stuck out with the greatest possible flirtatiousness. It reconciled him somewhat with the rest of her outfit. As for the powder and the eyeliner, to be honest, his simple heart didn't notice these things at first glance, and afterwards did not suspect them. Gregory Ivanich remembered his promise and tried not to look surprised; but the impishness of his daughter amused him so much that he could barely contain himself. The prim Englishwoman did not smile. She had guessed that the eyeliner and powder had been stolen from her commode, and a bright red blush of annoyance shone through the artfully-applied layer on her face. She shot a fiery look at the young prankster, who was postponing all explanations by pretending that she didn't notice anything amiss.

They sat down at the table. Alexy continued to play his distracted and ponderous role. Liza put on airs, she spoke through her teeth, in a singsong, and only in French. Her father kept looking at her, unable to understand what she was doing but finding it all very amusing. The Englishwoman grew furious and said nothing. Only Ivan Petrovich felt comfortable: he ate enough for two, drank to the dregs, smiled his smile and from time to time spoke and laughed amiably.

Finally they got up from the table; the guests left, and Gregory Ivanich let loose his laughter and questions. "Why did you take it into your head to trick them?" he asked Liza. "But you know, powder really does suit you; I know nothing of the secrets of the female toilet, but if I were you I'd start powdering myself, though maybe not as heavily." Liza was delighted by her plan's success. She hugged her father, promised to consider his advice and went quickly to smooth things over with the angry Miss Jackson, who after a while agreed to unlock her door and hear her out. Liza was ashamed to show her dark complexion in front of strangers; she hadn't dared to ask ... she'd been

sure that the good, dear Miss Jackson would forgive her ... and so on, and so on. Once she had been convinced that Liza was not poking fun at her, Miss Jackson calmed down, kissed Liza, and gave her a jar of English powder as a sign of their reconciliation. Liza accepted it with a show of sincere gratitude.

The reader can probably guess that the next morning Liza wasted no time in making her way to the grove for their meeting. "You were at the master's last night, Barin?" she immediately asked Alexy. "How did you like my lady?" Alexy answered that he had not noticed her. "Too bad," Liza responded. "Why?" asked Alexy. "Well, because I wanted to ask you if it was true what they say." "What do they say?" "Whether or not it is true, as they say, that my lady and I look alike?" "What nonsense! Next to you, she looks like a circus-freak." "Ah, Barin, it's a sin for you to say that. My lady is fair, and so smart! How could I compete with that?" Alexy swore that she was more beautiful than the fairest of all ladies and, to calm her completely, began to describe her mistress in such a humorous way that Liza laughed heartily. "But," she said with sigh, "Although my lady may be funny, all the same next to her I'm a fool." "Why should you be concerned about that?" Alexy said. "If you want, I can teach you to read." "Really?" Liza said. "You would really try that?" "Allow me, my dear; we'll begin this very instant." They sat down. Alexy pulled a pencil and notebook from his pocket, and Akulina learned the alphabet with surprising speed. Alexy could not help marveling at her intelligence. The next morning she wanted to try writing; at first the pencil wouldn't do what she wanted it to, but after a few minutes she could draw the letters quite well. "What a marvel," said Alexy. "Our reading is progressing faster than under the Lancaster System." "Indeed, by the third class Akulina had already moved on to reading "Natalya the Boyar's Daughter" out syllable by syllable, pausing only to make remarks that sincerely astonished Alexy, and filling an entire sheet of paper with aphorisms drawn from the very same story.

A week passed, during which the two started writing to one another. The hollow of an old oak served as their post office. Nastya secretly performed the duties of postmistress. Alexy brought his letters there, written out in large handwriting, and found simple blue notes covered in his beloved's scrawl. At the same time that her mind improved and began to form, Akulina was clearly developing an excellent writing style.

Meanwhile, the recent cordiality between Ivan Petrovich Berestov and Gregory Ivanich Muromsky had grown stronger and stronger, and was soon transformed into friendship. Here is how it happened: Muromsky thought frequently about how, when Ivan Petrovich died, his entire estate would pass into the hands of Alexy Ivanich; when that happened, Alexy Ivanich would be one of the wealthiest landowners in the province, at which point there would be no reason for him not to marry Liza. For his part, the old Berestov, though he acknowledged a certain amount of eccentricity (or, as he put it, silly Anglophilia) in his

neighbor's actions, did not deny that he possessed many excellent virtues, periodic resourcefulness for example. He was also a close relative of Count Pronsky, a famous and powerful man who could be quite useful to Alexy, and would probably (so thought Ian Petrovi) be thrilled at the chance to marry his daughter off advantageously. The old men had been thinking all this over to themselves up to this point, finally, however, they decided to discuss it together. They embraced, promised to work out the details in the proper manner, and accepted the responsibilities that each side entailed. One challenge stood in Muromsky's way: he had to persuade his Betsy to become better acquainted with Alexy, whom she had not seen since their memorable dinner. Apparently, they had not taken to one another; at least, Alexy had not yet made a second visit to Priluchino, and Liza retired to her room every time Ivan Petrovich honored them with his company. However, Gregory Ivanich thought, if Alexy was at my house every day, then Betsy would have no choice but to fall in love with him. It was the way things worked. Time arranges everything.

Ivan Petrovich was less worried about his plan's success. That very evening he called his son into his office, lit his pipe and, after a brief silence, said, "What's the matter, Alyosha, you hardly even talk about your military service anymore." "No, father," Alexy answered respectfully. "I see that you are not pleased about my joining the hussars: it is my duty to obey you." "Good," Ivan Petrovich answered. "You're a son that listens, I see: that comforts me; I don't want to hamper you; it is not necessary that you enlist ... at this point ... in the state service; anyway in the meantime, I intend for you to marry."

"Marry who?" Alexy asked, amazed.

"Elizabeth Gregoriyeвна Muromsky," Ivan Petrovich answered; "A wife must come from somewhere; isn't that true?"

"I haven't thought about marriage yet, father."

"You haven't thought about it, but I've thought about it, thought it through in fact."

"I'm sorry to say it, but Liza Muromsky doesn't please me."

"She will please you afterwards. Given patience, you'll come to love what you now dislike."

"I don't think I'm capable of giving her happiness."

"That's not your problem, her happiness I mean. What? So you'll do as your parent asks? Good!"

"By your leave, I don't want to marry and will not marry."

"You are getting married, or I will curse you and, with God as my witness, ruin the property and leave not even a quarter of a kopek to you. I'll give you three days to think it over, meanwhile don't let me catch sight of you."

Alexy knew that if his father took an idea into his head, then, in the words of Taras Scotinina, even a nail would not be able to knock it out. But Alexy was like his father, and it was just as difficult to out-argue him. He went to his room and began to think about things like the limits of parental influence, Lizaveta Grigoryevna, his father's

solemn promise to make him indigent, and, finally, Akulina. For the first time he saw clearly that he was terribly in love with her. The romantic idea of marrying a peasant and living with their difficulties entered his head, and the more he thought about this decisive act, the more it made sense to him. Their meeting in the grove had been cancelled for a long time due to rain. He wrote Akulina a letter in the most legible handwriting and the most exuberant words, explaining the threat of his ruin to her, and asking for her hand, at that very moment. He took the letter to the “post office” immediately, and went to sleep completely satisfied with himself.

Early the next morning Alexy, firm in his intentions, went to Muromsky in order to reveal his intentions to him. He hoped to appeal to his great-heartedness and to win him over to his side. “Is Gregory Ivanich home?” he asked, after leaving his horse at the foyer of the Prilichino estate. “Not at this time of day,” the serf answered. “Gregory Ivanich likes to go out in the mornings.” “How annoying!” Alexy thought. “Is Lizaveta Gregoryevna home at least?” “She’s home.” And Alexy jumped off his horse, handed the reins to a lackey and went in without announcing himself.

“This will decide everything,” he thought, approaching the living room. “I’ll explain it to her myself.” He went in ... and was struck dumb! Liza ... no, Akulina, the dear, dark-complexioned Akulina, not in a sarafan, but in a white morning dress, was sitting in front of the window and reading his letter; she was so engrossed with it that she had not heard him come in. Alexy could not restrain himself from shouting out for joy. Liza gave a start, raised her head, cried out and tried to run away. He caught her and held her. “Akulina, Akulina!” Liza tried to free herself from him ... “*Mais laissez-moi donc, monsieur; mais etes-vous fou?*”[†] she repeated, turning away. “Akulina! My love, Akulina!” he repeated, kissing her hands. Miss Jackson, witness to the whole scene, had no idea what to think. At this moment the door opened, and Gregory Ivanovich entered.

“Aha!” said Muromsky, “I see that the two of you have already come to an understanding ...”

My readers will spare me, I hope, the unnecessary duty of describing how all this ends.

[†] “Our remark holds” [Latin]

[†] “Let me be, sir; are you crazy?” [French]

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